



EXCITE

THE MAGAZINE OF
Fantasy AND

Science Fiction

JANUARY 60¢



ISAAC ASIMOV
The Lunar Honor-roll

Longlooth
by **EDGAR PANGBORN**

A Third Hand
by **DEAN R. KOONTZ**



MEL HUNTER

Fantasy and Science Fiction

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NOVELETS

Longtooth	EDGAR PANGBORN	5
A Third Hand	DEAN R. KOONTZ	64

SHORT STORIES

A Matter of Time and Place	LARRY EISENBERG	44
E Pluribus Solo	BRUCE MCALLISTER	50
Car Sinister	GENE WOLFE	57
Ride the Thunder	JACK CADY	90
Bughouse	DORIS PITKIN BUCK	100
A Delicate Operation	ROBIN SCOTT	114

FEATURES

Books	JOANNA RUSS	37
Cartoon	GAHAN WILSON	49
Science: The Lunar Honor-roll	ISAAC ASIMOV	104

Cover by Mel Hunter (see page 56)

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER
Andrew Porter, ASSISTANT EDITOR

Edward L. Ferman, EDITOR
Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE EDITOR

Dale Beardale, CIRCULATION MANAGER

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NO.: 51-25682

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 38, No. 1, Whole No. 224, Jan. 1970. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc., at 60¢ a copy. Annual subscription \$7.00; \$7.50 in Canada and Mexico, \$8.00 in all other countries. Publication office, 10 Ferry Street, Concord, N. H. 03301. Editorial and general mail should be sent to 347 East 53rd St., New York, N. Y. 10022. Second Class postage paid at Concord, N. H. Printed in U.S.A. © 1969 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

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Edgar Pangborn will be remembered by long-time readers for his fine stories about Davy ("The Golden Horn," Feb. 1962; "A War of No Consequence," March 1962), which were later combined into a novel called DAVY. Mr. Pangborn lives in Woodstock, New York, the pleasant country town that went through a temporary derangement as a result of this summer's mammoth rock festival. His latest story takes place in the country, in Maine, and it concerns something frightening that did not belong in the peaceful woods.

LONGTOOTH

by Edgar Pangborn

MY WORD IS GOOD. HOW CAN I prove it? Born in Darkfield, wasn't I? Stayed away thirty more years after college, but when I returned I was still Ben Dane, one of the Darkfield Danes, Judge Marcus Dane's eldest. And they knew my word was good. My wife died and I sickened of all cities; then my bachelor brother Sam died too, who'd lived all his life here in Darkfield, running his one-man law office over in Lohman—our nearest metropolis, pop. 6437. A fast coronary at fifty; I had loved him. Helen gone, then Sam—I wound up my unimportances and came home, inheriting Sam's housekeeper Ade-

laide Simmons, her grim stability and celestial cooking. Nostalgia for Maine is a serious matter, late in life: I had to yield. I expected a gradual drift into my childless old age playing correspondence chess, translating a few of the classics. I thought I could take for granted the continued respect of my neighbors. I say my word is good.

I will remember again that middle of March a few years ago, the snow skimming out of an afternoon sky as dirty as the bottom of an old aluminum pot. Harp Ryder's back road had been plowed since the last snowfall; I supposed Bolt-Bucket could make

the mile and a half in to his farm and out again before we got caught. Harp had asked me to get him a book if I was making a trip to Boston, any goddamn book that told about Eskimos, and I had one for him, De Poncins' *Kabloona*. I saw the midget devils of white running crazy down a huge slope of wind, and recalled hearing at the Darkfield News Bureau, otherwise Cleve's General Store, somebody mentioning a forecast of the worst blizzard in forty years. Joe Cleve, who won't permit a radio in the store because it pesters his ulcers, inquired of his Grand Inquisitor who dwells ten yards behind your right shoulder: "Why's it always got to be the worst in so-and-so many years, that going to help anybody?" The Bureau was still analyzing this difficult inquiry when I left, with my cigarettes and as much as I could remember of Adelaide's grocery list after leaving it on the dining table. It wasn't yet three when I turned in on Harp's back road, and a gust slammed at Bolt-Bucket like death with a shovel.

I tried to win momentum for the rise to the high ground, swerved to avoid an idiot rabbit and hit instead a patch of snow-hidden melt-and-freeze, skidding to a full stop from which nothing would extract us but a tow.

I was fifty-seven that year, my wind bad from too much smoking and my heart (I now know) no

stronger than Sam's. I quit cursing—gradually, to avoid sudden actions—and tucked *Kabloona* under my parka. I would walk the remaining mile to Ryder's, stay just to leave the book, say hello, and phone for a tow; then, since Harp never owned a car and never would, I could walk back and meet the truck.

If Leda Ryder knew how to drive, it didn't matter much after she married Harp. They farmed it, back in there, in almost the manner of Harp's ancestors of Jefferson's time. Harp did keep his two hundred laying hens by methods that were considered modern before the poor wretches got condemned to batteries, but his other enterprises came closer to antiquity. In his big kitchen garden he let one small patch of weeds fool themselves for an inch or two, so he'd have it to work at; they survived nowhere else. A few cows, a team, four acres for market crops, and a small dog Droopy, whose grandmother had made it somehow with a dachshund. Droopy's only menace in obese old age was a wheezing bark. The Ryders must have grown nearly all vital necessities except chewing tobacco and once in a while a new dress for Leda. Harp could snub the 20th Century, and I doubt if Leda was consulted about it in spite of his obsessive devotion for her. She was almost thirty years younger,

and yes, he should not have married her. Other side up just as scratchy: she should not have married him, but she did.

Harp was a dinosaur perhaps, but I grew up with him, he a year the younger. We swam, fished, helled around together. And when I returned to Darkfield growing old, he was one of the few who acted glad to see me, so far as you can trust what you read in a face like a granite promontory. Maybe twice a week Harp Ryder smiled.

I pushed on up the ridge, and noticed a going-and-coming set of wide tire-tracks already blurred with snow. That would be the egg-truck I had passed a quarter-hour since on the main road. Whenever the west wind at my back lulled, I could swing around and enjoy one of my favorite prospects of birch and hemlock lowland. From Ryder's Ridge there's no sign of Darkfield two miles southwest except one church spire. On clear days you glimpse Bald Mountain and his two big brothers, more than twenty miles west of us.

The snow was thickening. It brought relief and pleasure to see the black shingles of Harp's barn and the roof of his Cape Codder. Foreshortened, so that it looked snug against the barn; actually house and barn were connected by a two-story shed fifteen feet wide and forty feet long—

woodshed below, hen-loft above. The Ryders' sunrise-facing bedroom window was set only three feet above the eaves of that shed roof. They truly went to bed with the chickens. I shouted, for Harp was about to close the big shed door. He held it for me. I ran, and the storm ran after me. The west wind was bouncing off the barn; eddies howled at us. The temperature had tumbled ten degrees since I left Darkfield. The thermometer by the shed door read 15 degrees, and I knew I'd been a damn fool. As I helped Harp fight the shed door closed, I thought I heard Leda, crying.

A swift confused impression. The wind was exploring new ranges of passion, the big door squawked, and Harp was asking: "Ca' break down?" I do still think I heard Leda wail. If so, it ended as we got the door latched and Harp drew a newly fitted two-by-four bar across it. I couldn't understand that: the old latch was surely proof against any wind short of a hurricane.

"Bolt-Bucket never breaks down. Ought to get one, Harp—lots of company. All she did was go in the ditch."

"You might see her again come spring." His hens were scratching overhead, not yet scared by the storm. Harp's eyes were small gray glitters of trouble. "Ben, you figure a man's getting old at fifty-six?"

"No." My bones (getting old) ached for the warmth of his kitchen-dining-living-everything room, not for sad philosophy. "Use your phone, okay?"

"If the wires ain't down," he said, not moving, a man beaten on by other storms. "Them loafers didn't cut none of the overhang branches all summer. I told 'em of course, I told 'em how it would be . . . I meant, Ben, old enough to get dumb fancies?" My face may have told him I thought he was brooding about himself with a young wife. He frowned, annoyed that I hadn't taken his meaning. "I meant, *seeing* things. Things that can't be so, but—"

"We can all do some of that at any age, Harp."

That remark was a stupid brush-off, a stone for bread, because I was cold, impatient, wanted in. Harp had always a tense one-way sensitivity. His face chilled. "Well, come in, warm up. Leda ain't feeling too good. Getting a cold or something."

When she came downstairs and made me welcome, her eyes were reddened. I don't think the wind made that noise. Droopy waddled from her basket behind the stove to snuff my feet and give me my usual low passing mark.

Leda never had it easy there, young and passionate with scant mental resources. She was twenty-eight that year, looking tall because she carried her firm body

handsomely. Some of the sullenness in her big mouth and lucid gray eyes was sexual challenge, some pure discontent. I liked Leda; her nature was not one for animosity or meanness. Before her marriage the Darkfield News Bureau used to declare with its customary scrupulous fairness that Leda had been covered by every goddamn thing in pants within thirty miles. For once the Bureau may have spoken a grain of truth in the malice, for Leda did have the smoldering power that draws men without word or gesture. After her abrupt marriage to Harp—Sam told me all this; I wasn't living in Darkfield then and hadn't met her—the garbage-gossip went hastily underground: enraging Harp Ryder was never healthy.

The phone wires weren't down, yet. While I waited for the garage to answer, Harp said, "Ben, I can't let you walk back in that. Stay over, huh?"

I didn't want to. It meant extra work and inconvenience for Leda, and I was ancient enough to crave my known safe burrow. But I felt Harp wanted me to stay for his own sake. I asked Jim Short at the garage to go ahead with Bolt-Bucket if I wasn't there to meet him. Jim roared: "Know what it's doing right now?"

"Little spit of snow, looks like."

"Jesus!" He covered the mouthpiece imperfectly. I heard

his enthusiastic voice ring through cold-iron echoes: "Hey, old Ben's got that thing into the ditch again! Ain't that something . . . ? Listen, Ben, I can't make no promises. Got both tow trucks out already. You better stop over and praise the Lord you got that far."

"Okay," I said. "It wasn't much of a ditch."

Leda fed us coffee. She kept glancing toward the landing at the foot of the stairs where a night-darkness already prevailed. A closed-in stairway slanted down at a never-used front door; beyond that landing was the other ground floor room-parlor, spare, guest room—where I would sleep. I don't know what Leda expected to encounter in that shadow. Once when a chunk of firewood made an odd noise in the range, her lips clamped shut on a scream.

The coffee warmed me. By that time the weather left no loophole for argument. Not yet 3:30, but west and north were lost in furious black. Through the hissing white flood I could just see the front of the barn forty feet away. "Nobody's going no place into that," Harp said. His little house shuddered, enforcing the words. "Leda, you don't look too brisk. Get you some rest."

"I better see to the spare room for Ben."

Neither spoke with much tenderness, but it glowed openly in him when she turned her back.

Then some other need bent his granite face out of its normal seams. His whole gaunt body leaning forward tried to help him talk. "You wouldn't figure me for a man'd go off his rocker?" he asked.

"Of course not. What's biting, Harp?"

"There's something in the woods, got no right to be there." To me that came as a letdown of relief: I would not have to listen to another's marriage problems. "I wish, b' Jesus Christ, it would hit somebody else once, so I could say what I know and not be laughed at all to hell. I *ain't* one for dumb fancies."

You walked on eggs, with Harp. He might decide any minute that I was laughing. "Tell me," I said. "If anything's out there now it must feel a mite chilly."

"Ayah." He went to the north window, looking out where we knew the road lay under white confusion. Harp's land sloped down on the other side of the road to the edge of mighty evergreen forest. Katahdin stands more than fifty miles north and a little east of us. We live in a withering, shrink-world, but you could still set out from Harp's farm and, except for the occasional country road and the rivers—not many large ones—you could stay in deep forest all the way to the tundra, or Alaska. Harp said, "This kind of weather is when it comes."

He sank into his beat-up kitchen armchair and reached for *Kabloona*. He had barely glanced at the book while Leda was with us. "Funny name."

"Kabloona's an Eskimo word for white man."

"He done these pictures . . . ? Be they good, Ben?"

"I like 'em. Photographs in the back."

"Oh." He turned the pages hastily for those, but studied only the ones that showed the strong Eskimo faces, and his interest faded. Whatever he wanted was not here. "These people, be they—civilized?"

"In their own way, sure."

"Ayah, this guy looks like he could find his way in the woods."

"Likely the one thing he couldn't do, Harp. They never see a tree unless they come south, and they hate to do that. Anything below the Arctic is too warm."

"That a fact . . . ? Well, it's a nice book. How much was it?" I'd found it second-hand; he paid me to the exact penny. "I'll be glad to read it." He never would. It would end up on the shelf in the parlor with the Bible, an old almanac, a Longfellow, until some day this place went up for auction and nobody remembered Harp's way of living.

"What's this all about, Harp?"

"Oh . . . I was hearing things in the woods, back last summer. I'd think, fox, then I'd know it

wasn't. Make your hair stand right on end. Lost a cow, last August, from the north pasture across the road. Section of board fence tore out. I mean, Ben, the two top boards was *pulled out from the nail holes*. No hammer marks."

"Bear?"

"Only track I found looked like bear except too small. You know a bear wouldn't *pull* it out, Ben."

"Cow slamming into it, panicked by something?"

He remained patient with me. "Ben, would I build a cow-pasture fence nailing the cross-pieces from the outside? Cow hit it with all her weight she might bust it, sure. And kill herself doing it, be blood and hair all over the split boards, and she'd be there, not a mile and a half away into the woods. Happened during a big thunderstorm. I figured it had to be somebody with a spite ag'inst me, maybe some son of a bitch wanting the prop'ty, trying to scare me off that's lived here all my life and my family before me. But that don't make sense. I found the cow a week later, what was left. Way into the woods. The head and the bones. Hide tore up and flang around. Any *person* dressing off a beef, he'll cut whatever he wants and take off with it. He don't sit down and chaw the meat off the *bones*, b' Jesus Christ. He don't tear the thighbone out of the joint . . . All right, maybe bear. But no bear did that job on that

fence and then driv old Nell a mile and a half into the woods to kill her. Nice little Jersey, clever's a kitten. Leda used to make over her, like she don't usually do with the stock . . . I've looked plenty in the woods since then, never turned up anything. Once and again I did smell something. Fishy, like bear-smell but—*different*."

"But Harp, with snow on the ground—"

"Now you'll really call me crazy. When the weather is clear, I ain't once found his prints. I hear him then, at night, but I go out by daylight where I think the sound was, there's no trail. Just the usual snow tracks. I know. He lives in the trees and don't come down except when it's storming, I got to believe that? Because then he does come, Ben, when the weather's like now, like right now. And old Ned and Jerry out in the stable go wild, and sometimes we hear his noise under the window. I shine my flashlight through the glass—never catch sight of him. I go out with the ten-gauge if there's any light to see by, and there's prints around the house—holes filling up with snow. By morning there'll be maybe some marks left, and they'll lead off to the north woods, but under the trees you won't find it. So he gets up in the branches and travels that away? . . . Just once I have seen him, Ben. Last October. I better tell you

one other thing first. A day or so after I found what was left of old Nell, I lost six roaster chickens. I made over a couple box stalls, maybe you remember, so the birds could be out on range and roost in the barn at night. Good doors, and I always locked 'em. Two in the morning, Ned and Jerry go crazy. I got out through the barn into the stable, and they was spooked, Ned trying to kick his way out. I got 'em quiet, looked all over the stable—loft, harness room, everywhere. Not a thing. Dead quiet night, no moon. It had to be something the horses smelled. I come back into the barn, and found one of the chicken-pen doors open—*tore* out from the lock. Chicken thief would bring along something to pry with—wouldn't he be a Christly idjut if he didn't . . . ? Took six birds, six nice eight-pound roasters, and left the heads on the floor—bit-ten off."

"Harp—some lunatic. People *can* go insane that way. There are old stories—"

"Been trying to believe that. Would a man live the winter out there? Twenty below zero?"

"Maybe a cave—animal skins."

"I've boarded up the whole back of the barn. Done the same with the hen-loft windows—two-by-fours with four-inch spikes driv slantwise. They be twelve feet off the ground, and he ain't come for 'em, not yet . . . So after that happened I sent for Sheriff Robart.

Son of a bitch happens to live in Darkfield, you'd think he might've took an interest."

"Do any good?"

Harp laughed. He did that by holding my stare, making no sound, moving no muscle except a disturbance at the eye corners. A New England art; maybe it came over on the *Mayflower*. "Robart he come by, after a while. I showed him that door. I showed him them chicken heads. Told him how I'd been spending my nights out there on my ass, with the ten-gauge." Harp rose to unload tobacco juice into the range fire; he has a theory it purifies the air. "Ben, I might've showed him them chicken heads a shade close to his nose. By the time he got here, see, they wasn't all that fresh. He made out he'd look around and let me know. Mid-September. Ain't seen him since."

"Might've figured he wouldn't be welcome?"

"Why, he'd be welcome as shit on a tablecloth."

"You spoke of—seeing it, Harp?"

"Could call it seeing . . . All right. It was during them Indian summer days—remember? Like June except them pretty colors, smell of windfalls—God, I like that, I like October. I'd gone down to the slope across the road where I mended my fence after losing old Nell. Just leaning there, guess I was tired. Late afternoon, sky

pinking up. You know how the fence cuts across the slope to my east wood lot. I've let the bushes grow free—lot of elder, other stuff the birds come for. I was looking down toward that little break between the north woods and my wood lot, where a bit of old grown-up pasture shows through. Pretty spot. Painter fella come by a few years ago and done a picture of it, said the place looked like a corral, dunno what the hell that is, he didn't say."

I pushed at his brown study. "You saw it there?"

"No. Off to my right in them elder bushes. Fifty feet from me, I guess. By God I didn't turn my head. I got it with the tail of my eye and turned the other way as if I meant to walk back to the road. Made like busy with something in the grass, come wandering back to the fence some nearer. He stayed for me, a brownish patch in them bushes by the big yellow birch. Near the height of a man. No gun with me, not even a stick . . . Big shoulders, couldn't see his god-damn feet. He don't stand more'n five feet tall. His hands, if he's got real ones, hung out of my sight in a tangle of elder branches. He's got brown fur, Ben, reddish-brown fur all over him. His face too, his head, his big thick neck. There's a shine to fur in sunlight, you can't be mistook. So—I did look at him direct. Tried to act like I still didn't see him, but he knowed. He

melted back and got the birch between him and me. Not a sound." And then Harp was listening for Leda upstairs. He went on softly: "Ayah, I ran back for a gun, and searched the woods, for all the good it did me. You'll want to know about his face. I ain't told Leda all this part. See, she's scared, I don't want to make it no worse, I just said it was some animal that snuck off before I could see it good. A big face, Ben. Head real human except it sticks out too much around the jaw. Not much nose—open spots in the fur. Ben, the—the *teeth*! I seen his mouth drop open and he pulled up one side of his lip to show me them stabbing things. I've seen as big as that on a full-grown bear. That's what I'll hear, I ever try to tell this. They'll say I seen a bear. Now I shot my first bear when I was sixteen and Pa took me over toward Jackman. I've got me one maybe every other year since then. I know 'em, all their ways. But that's what I'll hear if I tell the story."

I am a frustrated naturalist, loaded with assorted facts. I know there aren't any monkeys or apes that could stand our winters except maybe the harmless Himalayan langur. No such beast as Harp described lived anywhere on the planet. It didn't help. Harp was honest; he was rational; he wanted reasonable explanation as much as I did. Harp wasn't the village athe-

ist for nothing. I said, "I guess you will, Harp. People mostly won't take the—unusual."

"Maybe you'll hear him tonight, Ben."

Leda came downstairs, and heard part of that. "He's been telling you, Ben. What do you think?"

"I don't know what to think."

"Led', I thought, if I imitate that noise for him—"

"No!" She had brought some mending and was about to sit down with it, but froze as if threatened by attack. "I couldn't stand it, Harp. And—it might bring them."

"Them?" Harp chuckled uneasily. "I don't guess I could do it that good he'd come for it."

"Don't *do* it, Harp!"

"All right, hon." Her eyes were closed, her head drooping back. "Don't git nerved up so."

I started wondering whether a man still seeming sane could dream up such a horror for the unconscious purpose of tormenting a woman too young for him, a woman he could never imagine he owned. If he told her a fox bark wasn't right for a fox, she'd believe him. I said, "We shouldn't talk about it if it upsets her."

He glanced at me like a man floating up from under water. Leda said in a small, aching voice: "I wish to *God* we could move to Boston."

The granite face closed in de-

fensiveness. "Led', we been over all that. Nothing is going to drive me off of my land. I got no time for the city at my age. What the Jesus would I do? Night watchman? Sweep out somebody's back room, b' Jesus Christ? Savings'd be gone in no time. We been all over it. We ain't moving nowhere."

"I could find work." For Harp of course that was the worst thing she could have said. She probably knew it from his stricken silence. She said clumsily, "I forgot something upstairs." She snatched up her mending and she was gone.

We talked no more of it the rest of the day. I followed through the milking and other chores, lending a hand where I could, and we made everything as secure as we could against storm and other enemies. The long-toothed furry thing was the spectral guest at dinner, but we cut him, on Leda's account, or so we pretended. Supper would have been awkward anyway. They weren't in the habit of putting up guests, and Leda was a rather deadly cook because she cared nothing about it. A Dark-field girl, I suppose she had the usual 20th-Century mishmash of television dreams until some impulse or maybe false signs of pregnancy tricked her into marrying a man out of the 19th. We had venison treated like beef and overdone vegetables. I don't like venison even when it's treated right.

At six Harp turned on his

battery radio and sat stone-faced through the day's bad news and the weather forecast—"a blizzard which may prove the worst in 42 years. Since 3:00 PM, 18 inches have fallen at Bangor, 21 at Boston. Precipitation is not expected to end until tomorrow. Winds will increase during the night with gusts up to 70 miles per hour." Harp shut it off, with finality. On other evenings I had spent there he let Leda play it after supper only kind of soft, so there had been a continuous muted bleat and blatter all evening. Tonight Harp meant to listen for other sounds. Leda washed the dishes, said an early good night, and fled upstairs.

Harp didn't talk, except as politeness obliged him to answer some blah of mine. We sat and listened to the snow and the lunatic wind. A hour of it was enough for me; I said I was beat and wanted to turn in early. Harp saw me to my bed in the parlor and placed a new chunk of rock maple in the pot-bellied stove. He produced a difficult granite smile, maybe using up his allowance for the week, and pulled out a bottle from a cabinet that had stood for many years below a parlor print—George Washington, I think, concluding a treaty with some offbeat sufferer from hepatitis who may have been General Cornwallis if the latter had two left feet. The bottle contained a brand of rye

that Harp sincerely believed to be drinkable, having charred his gullet forty-odd years trying to prove it. While my throat healed Harp said, "Shouldn't 've bothered you with all this crap, Ben. Hope it ain't going to spoil your sleep." He got me his spare flashlight, then let me be, and closed the door.

I heard him drop back into his kitchen armchair. Under too many covers, lamp out, I heard the cruel whisper of the snow. The stove muttered, a friend, making me a cocoon of living heat in a waste of outer cold. Later I heard Leda at the head of the stairs, her voice timid, tired, and sweet with invitation: "You comin' up to bed, Harp?" The stairs creaked under him. Their door closed; presently she cried out in that desired pain that is brief release from trouble.

I remembered something Adelaide Simmons had told me about this house, where I had not gone upstairs since Harp and I were boys. Adelaide, one of the very few women in Darkfield who never spoke unkindly of Leda, said that the tiny west room across from Harp's and Leda's bedroom was fixed up for a nursery, and Harp wouldn't allow anything in there but baby furniture. Had been so since they were married seven years before.

Another hour dragged on, in my exasperations of sleeplessness.

Then I heard Longtooth.

The noise came from the west side, beyond the snow-hidden vegetable garden. When it snatched me from the edge of sleep, I tried to think it was a fox barking, the ringing, metallic shriek the little red beast can belch dragon-like from his throat. But wide awake, I knew it had been much deeper, chestier. Horned owl?—no. A sound that belonged to ancient times when men relied on chipped stone weapons and had full reason to fear the dark.

The cracks in the stove gave me firelight for groping back into my clothes. The wind had not calmed at all. I stumbled to the west window, buttoning up, and found it a white blank. Snow had drifted above the lower sash. On tiptoe I could just see over it. A light appeared, dimly illuminating the snowfield beyond. That would be coming from a lamp in the Ryders' bedroom, shining through the nursery room and so out, weak and diffused, into the blizzard chaos.

Yaaarrhh!

Now it had drawn horribly near. From the north windows of the parlor I saw black nothing. Harp squeaked down to my door. "Wake, Ben?"

"Yes. Come look at the west window."

He had left no night light burning in the kitchen, and only a scant glow came down to the landing from the bedroom. He murmured behind me, "Ayah, snow's

up some. Must be over three foot on the level by now."

Yaaarrhh!

The voice had shouted on the south side, the blinder side of the house, overlooked only by one kitchen window and a small one in the pantry where the hand pump stood. The view from the pantry window was mostly blocked by a great maple that overtopped the house. I heard the wind shrilling across the tree's winter bones.

"Ben, you want to git your boots on? Up to you—can't ask it. I might have to go out." Harp spoke in an undertone as if the beast might understand him through the tight walls.

"Of course." I got into my knee boots and caught up my parka as I followed him into the kitchen. A .30-caliber rifle and his heavy shotgun hung on deerhorn over the door to the woodshed. He found them in the dark.

What courage I possessed that night came from being shamed into action, from fearing to show a poor face to an old friend in trouble. I went through the Normandy invasion. I have camped out alone, when I was younger and healthier, in our moose and bear country, and slept nicely. But that noise of Longtooth stole courage. It ached along the channel of the spine.

I had the spare flashlight, but knew Harp didn't want me to use it here. I could make out the furniture, and Harp reaching for the

gun rack. He already had on his boots, fur cap, and mackinaw. "You take this'n," he said, and put the ten-gauge in my hands. "Both barrels loaded. Ain't my way to do that, ain't right, but since this thing started—"

Yaaarrhh!

"Where's he got to now?" Harp was by the south window. "Round this side?"

"I thought so . . . Where's Droopy?"

Harp chuckled thinly. "Poor little shit! She come upstairs at the first sound of him and went under the bed. I told Led' to stay upstairs. She'd want a light down here. Wouldn't make sense."

Then, apparently from the east side of the hen-loft and high, booming off some resonating surface: *Yaaarrhh!*

"He can't! Jesus, that's twelve foot off the ground!" But Harp plunged out into the shed, and I followed. "Keep your light on the floor, Ben." He ran up the narrow stairway. "Don't shine it on the birds, they'll act up."

So far the chickens, stupid and virtually blind in the dark, were making only a peevish tut-tutting of alarm. But something was clinging to the outside of the barricaded east window, snarling, chattering teeth, pounding on the two-by-fours. With a fist?—it sounded like nothing else. Harp snapped, "Get your light on the window!" And he fired through the glass.

We heard no outcry. Any noise outside was covered by the storm and the squawks of the hens scandalized by the shot. The glass was dirty from their continual disturbance of the litter; I couldn't see through it. The bullet had drilled the pane without shattering it, and passed between the two-by-fours, but the beast could have dropped before he fired. "I got to go out there. You stay, Ben." Back in the kitchen he exchanged rifle for shotgun. "Might not have no chance to aim. You remember this piece, don't y'?"—eight in the clip."

"I remember it."

"Good. Keep your ears open." Harp ran out through the door that gave on a small paved area by the woodshed. To get around under the east loft window he would have to push through the snow behind the barn, since he had blocked all the rear openings. He could have circled the house instead, but only by bucking the west wind and fighting deeper drifts. I saw his big shadow melt out of sight.

Leda's voice quavered down to me: "He—get it?"

"Don't know. He's gone to see. Sit tight . . ."

I heard that infernal bark once again before Harp returned, and again it sounded high off the ground; it must have come from the big maple. And then moments later—I was still trying to pierce the dark, watching for Harp—a

vast smash of broken glass and wood, and the violent bang of the door upstairs. One small wheezing shriek cut short, and one scream such as no human being should ever hear. I can still hear it.

I think I lost some seconds in shock. Then I was groping up the narrow stairway, clumsy with the rifle and flashlight. Wind roared at the opening of the kitchen door, and Harp was crowding past me, thrusting me aside. But I was close behind him when he flung the bedroom door open. The blast from the broken window that had slammed the door had also blown out the lamp. But our flashlights said at once that Leda was not there. Nothing was, nothing living.

Droopy lay in a mess of glass splinters and broken window sash, dead from a crushed neck—something had stamped on her. The bedspread had been pulled almost to the window—maybe Leda's hand had clenched on it. I saw blood on some of the glass fragments, and on the splintered sash, a patch of reddish fur.

Harp ran back downstairs. I lingered a few seconds. The arrow of fear was deep in me, but at the moment it made me numb. My light touched up an ugly photograph on the wall, Harp's mother at fifty or so, petrified and acid-faced before the camera, a puritan deity with shallow, haunted eyes. I remembered her.

Harp had kicked over the traces when his father died, and quit going to church. Mrs. Ryder "dis-owned" him. The farm was his; she left him with it and went to live with a widowed sister in Lohman, and died soon, unreconciled. Harp lived on as a bachelor, crank, recluse, until his strange marriage in his fifties. Now here was Ma still watchful, pucker-faced, unforgiving. In my dullness of shock I thought: Oh, they probably always made love with the lights out.

But now Leda wasn't there.

I hurried after Harp, who had left the kitchen door to bang in the wind. I got out there with rifle and flashlight, and over across the road I saw his torch. No other light, just his small gleam and mine.

I knew as soon as I had forced myself beyond the corner of the house and into the fantastic embrace of the storm that I could never make it. The west wind ground needles into my face. The snow was up beyond the middle of my thighs. With weak lungs and maybe an imperfect heart, I could do nothing out here except die quickly to no purpose. In a moment Harp would be starting down the slope to the woods. His trail was already disappearing under my beam. I drove myself a little further, and an instant's lull in the storm allowed me to shout: "Harp! I can't follow!"

He heard. He cupped his mouth and yelled back: "Don't try! Git back to the house! Telephone!" I waved to acknowledge the message and struggled back.

I only just made it. Inside the kitchen doorway I fell flat, gun and flashlight clattering off somewhere, and there I stayed until I won back enough breath to keep myself living. My face and hands were ice-blocks, then fires. While I worked at the task of getting air into my body, one thought continued, an inner necessity: *There must be a rational cause. I do not abandon the rational cause.* At length I hauled myself up and stumbled to the telephone. The line was dead.

I found the flashlight and reeled upstairs with it. I stepped past poor Droopy's body and over the broken glass to look through the window space. I could see that snow had been pushed off the shed roof near the bedroom window; the house sheltered that area from the full drive of the west wind, so some evidence remained. I guessed that whatever came must have jumped to the house roof from the maple, then down to the shed roof, and then hurled itself through the closed window without regard for it as an obstacle. Losing a little blood and a little fur.

I glanced around and could not find that fur now. Wind must have pushed it out of sight. I forced the

door shut. Downstairs, I lit the table lamps in kitchen and parlor. Harp might need those beacons—if he came back. I refreshed the fires, and gave myself a dose of Harp's horrible whisky. It was nearly one in the morning. If he never came back?

It might be days before they could plow out the road. When the storm let up I could use Harp's snowshoes, maybe . . .

Harp came back, at 1:20, bent and staggering. He let me support him to the armchair. When he could speak he said, "No trail. No trail." He took the bottle from my hands and pulled on it. "Christ Jesus! What can I do? Ben . . . ? I got to go to the village, get help. If they got any help to give."

"Do you have an extra pair of snowshoes?"

He stared toward me, battling confusion. "Hah? No, I ain't. Better you stay anyhow. I'll bring yours from your house if you want, if I can git there." He drank again and slammed in the cork with the heel of his hand. "I'll leave you the ten-gauge."

He got his snowshoes from a closet. I persuaded him to wait for coffee. Haste could accomplish nothing now; we could not say to each other that we knew Leda was dead. When he was ready to go, I stepped outside with him into the mad wind. "Anything you want me to do before you get back?" He tried to think about it.

"I guess not, Ben . . . God, ain't I *lived* right? No, that don't make sense. God? That's a laugh." He swung away. Two or three great strides and the storm took him.

That was about two o'clock. For four hours I was alone in the house. Warmth returned, with the bedroom door closed and fires working hard. I carried the kitchen lamp into the parlor, and then huddled in the nearly total dark of the kitchen with my back to the wall, watching all the windows, the ten-gauge near my hand, but I did not expect a return of the beast, and there was none.

The night grew quieter, perhaps because the house was so drifted in that snow muted the sounds. I was cut off from the battle, buried alive.

Harp would get back. The seasons would follow their natural way, and somehow we would learn what had happened to Leda. I supposed the beast would have to be something in the human pattern—mad, deformed, gone wild, but still human.

After a time I wondered why we had heard no excitement in the stable. I forced myself to take up gun and flashlight and go look. I groped through the woodshed, big with the jumping shadows of Harp's cordwood, and into the barn. The cows were peacefully drowsing. In the center alley I dared to send my weak beam swooping and glimmering through

the ghastly distances of the hayloft. Quiet, just quiet; natural rustling of mice. Then to the stable, where Ned whickered and let me rub his brown cheek, and Jerry rolled a humorous eye. I suppose no smell had reached them to touch off panic, and perhaps they had heard the barking often enough so that it no longer disturbed them. I went back to my post, and the hours crawled along a ridge between the pits of terror and exhaustion. Maybe I slept.

No color of sunrise that day, but I felt paleness and change; even a blizzard will not hide the fact of dayshine somewhere. I breakfasted on bacon and eggs, fed the hens, forked down hay and carried water for the cows and horses. The one cow in milk, a jumpy Ayrshire, refused to concede that I meant to be useful. I'd done no milking since I was a boy, the knack was gone from my hands, and relief seemed less important to her than kicking over the pail; she was getting more amusement than discomfort out of it, so for the moment I let it go. I made myself busy-work shoveling a clear space by the kitchen door. The wind was down, the snowfall persistent but almost peaceful. I pushed out beyond the house and learned that the stuff was up over my hips.

Out of that, as I turned back, came Harp in his long, snowshoe stride, and down the road three

others. I recognized Sheriff Robart, overfed but powerful; and Bill Hastings, wry and ageless, a cousin of Harp's and one of his few friends; and last, Curt Davidson, perhaps a friend to Sheriff Robart but certainly not to Harp.

I'd known Curt as a thick-witted loudmouth when he was a kid; growing to man's years hadn't done much for him. And when I saw him I thought, irrationally perhaps: Not good for our side. A kind of absurdity, and yet Harp and I were joined against the world simply because we had experienced together what others were going to call impossible, were going to interpret in harsh, even damnable ways; and no help for it.

I saw the white thin blur of the sun, the strength of it growing. Nowhere in all the white expanse had the wind and the new snow allowed us any mark of the visitation of the night.

The men reached my cleared space and shook off snow. I opened the woodshed. Harp gave me one hopeless glance of inquiry and I shook my head.

"Having a little trouble?" That was Robart, taking off his snowshoes.

Harp ignored him. "I got to look after the chores." I told him I'd done it except for that damn cow. "Oh, Bess, ayah, she's nervy. I'll see to her." He gave me my snowshoes that he had strapped to

his back. "Adelaide, she wanted to know about your groceries. Said I figured they was in the ca'."

"Good as an icebox," says Robart, real friendly.

Curt had to have his pleasures too. "Ben, you sure you got hold of old Bess by the right end, where the tits was?" Curt giggles at his own jokes, so nobody else is obliged to. Bill Hastings spat in the snow.

"Okay if I go in?" Robart asked. It wasn't a simple inquiry: he was present officially and meant to have it known. Harp looked him up and down.

"Nobody stopping you. Didn't bring you here to stand around, I suppose."

"Harp," said Robart pleasantly enough, "don't give me a hard time. You come tell me certain things has happened, I got to look into it is all." But Harp was already striding down the woodshed to the barn entrance. The others came into the house with me, and I put on water for fresh coffee. "Must be your ca' down the rud a piece, Ben? Heard you kind of went into a ditch. All's you can see now is a hump in the snow. Deep freeze might be good for her, likely you've tried everything else." But I wasn't feeling comic, and never had been on those terms with Robart. I grunted, and his face shed mirth as one slips off a sweater. "Okay, what's the score? Harp's gone and told me a story I couldn't

feed to the dogs, so what about it? Where's Mrs. Ryder?"

Davidson giggled again. It's a nasty little sound to come out of all that beef. I don't think Robart had much enthusiasm for him either, but it seems he had sworn in the fellow as a deputy before they set out. "Yes, sir," said Curt, "that was *really* a story, that was."

"Where's Mrs. Ryder?"

"Not here," I told him. "We think she's dead."

He glowered, rubbing cold out of his hands. "Seen that window. Looks like the frame is smashed."

"Yes, from the outside. When Harp gets back you'd better look. I closed the door on that room and haven't opened it. There'll be more snow, but you'll see about what we saw when we got up there."

"Let's look right now," said Curt.

Bill Hastings said, "Curt, ain't you a mite busy for a dep'ty? Mr. Dane said when Harp gets back." Bill and I are friends; normally he wouldn't mister me. I think he was trying to give me some flavor of authority.

I acknowledged the alliance by asking: "You a deputy too, Bill?" Giving him an opportunity to spit in the stove, replace the lid gently, and reply: "Shit no."

Harp returned and carried the milk pail to the pantry. Then he was looking us over. "Bill, I got to try the woods again. You want to come along?"

"Sure, Harp. I didn't bring no gun."

"Take my ten-gauge."

"Curt here'll go along," said Robart. "Real good man on snowshoes. Interested in wild life."

Harp said, "That's funny, Robart. I guess that's the funniest thing I heard since Cutler's little girl fell under the tractor. You joining us too?"

"Fact is, Harp, I kind of pulled a muscle in my back coming up here. Not getting no younger neither. I believe I'll just look around here a little. Trust you got no objection? To me looking around a little?"

"Coffee's dripped," I said.

"Thing of it is, if I'd've thought you had any objection, I'd've been obliged to get me a warrant."

"Thanks, Ben." Harp gulped the coffee scalding. "Why, if looking around the house is the best you can do, Sher'f, I got no objection. Ben, I shouldn't be keeping you away from your affairs, but would you stay? Kind of keep him company? Not that I got much in the house, but still—you know—"

"I'll stay." I wished I could tell him to drop that manner; it only got him deeper in the mud.

Robart handed Davidson his gun belt and holster. "Better have it, Curt, so to be in style."

Harp and Bill were outside getting on their snowshoes; I half heard some remark of Harp's about

the sheriff's aching back. They took off. The snow had almost ceased. They passed out of sight down the slope to the north, and Curt went plowing after them. Behind me Robart said, "You'd think Harp believed it himself."

"That's how it's to be? You make us both liars before you've even done any looking?"

"I got to try to make sense of it is all." I followed him up to the bedroom. It was cruelly cold. He touched Droopy's stiff corpse with his foot. "Hard to figure a man killing his own dog."

"We get nowhere with that kind of idea."

"Ben, you got to see this thing like it looks to other people. And keep out of my hair."

"That's what scares me, Jack. Something unreasonable did happen, and Harp and I were the only ones to experience it—except Mrs. Ryder."

"You claim you saw this—animal?"

"I didn't say that. I heard her scream. When we got upstairs this room was the way you see it." I looked around, and again couldn't find that scrap of fur, but I spoke of it, and I give Robart credit for searching. He shook out the bedspread and blankets, examined the floor and the closet. He studied the window space, leaned out for a look at the house wall and the shed roof. His big feet avoided the broken glass, and he squatted for

a long gaze at the pieces of window sash. Then he bore down on me, all policemen personified, a massive, rather intelligent, conventionally honest man with no patience for imagination, no time for any fact not already in the books. "Piece of fur, huh?" He made it sound as if I'd described a Jabberwock with eyes of flame. "Okay, we're done up here." He motioned me downstairs—all policemen who'd ever faced a crowd's dangerous stupidity with their own.

As I retreated I said, "Hope you won't be too busy to have a chemist test the blood on that sash."

"We'll do that." He made move-along motions with his slab hands. "Going to be a pleasure to do that little thing for you and your friend."

Then he searched the entire house, shed, barn, and stable. I had never before watched anyone on police business; I had to admire his zeal. I got involved in the farce of holding the flashlight for him while he rooted in the cellar. In the shed I suggested that if he wanted to restack twenty-odd cords of wood he'd better wait till Harp could help him; he wasn't amused. He wasn't happy in the barn loft either. Shifting tons of hay to find a hypothetical corpse was not a one-man job. I knew he was capable of returning with a crew and machinery to do exactly

that. And by his lights it was what he ought to do. Then we were back in the kitchen, Robart giving himself a manicure with his jackknife, and I down to my last cigarette, almost the last of my endurance.

Robart was not unsubtle. I answered his questions as temperately as I could—even, for instance: "Wasn't you a mite sweet on Leda yourself?" I didn't answer any of them with flat silence; to do that right you need an accompanying act like spitting in the stove, and I'm not a chewer. From the north window he said: "Comin' back. It figures." They had been out a little over an hour.

Harp stood by the stove with me to warm his hands. He spoke as if alone with me: "No trail, Ben." What followed came in an undertone: "Ben, you told me about a friend of yours, scientist or something, professor—"

"Professor Malcolm?" I remembered mentioning him to Harp a long while before; I was astonished at his recalling it. Johnny Malcolm is a professor of biology who has avoided too much specialization. Not a really close friend. Harp was watching me out of a granite despair as if he had asked me to appeal to some higher court. I thought of another acquaintance in Boston too, whom I might consult—Dr. Kahn, a psychiatrist who had once seen my wife Helen through a difficult time . . .

"Harp," said Robart, "I got to

ask you a couple, three things. I sent word to Dick Hammond to get that goddamn plow of his into this road as quick as he can. Believe he'll try. Whiles we wait on him, we might 's well talk. You know I don't like to get tough."

"Talk away," said Harp, "only Ben here he's got to get home without waiting on no Dick Hammond."

"That a fact, Ben?"

"Yes. I'll keep in touch."

"Do that," said Robart, dismissing me. As I left he was beginning a fresh manicure, and Harp waited rigidly for the ordeal to continue. I felt morbidly that I was abandoning him.

Still—corpus delicti—nothing much more would happen until Leda Ryder was found. Then if her body were found dead by violence, with no acceptable evidence of Longtooth's existence—well, what then?

I don't think Robart would have let me go if he'd known my first act would be to call Short's brother Mike and ask him to drive me in to Lohman where I could get a bus for Boston.

Johnny Malcolm said, "I can see this is distressing you, and you wouldn't lie to me. But, Ben, as biology it won't do. Ain't no such animile. You know that."

He wasn't being stuffy. We were having dinner at a quiet restaurant, and I had of course en-

joyed the roast duckling too much. Johnny is a rock-ribbed beanpole who can eat like a walking famine with no regrets. "Suppose," I said, "just for argument and because it's not biologically inconceivable, that there's a basis for the Yeti legend."

"Not inconceivable. I'll give you that. So long as any poorly known corners of the world are left—the Himalayan uplands, jungles, tropic swamps, the tundra—legends will persist and some of them will have little gleams of truth. You know what I think about moon flights and all that?" He smiled; privately I was hearing Leda scream. "One of our strongest reasons for them, and for the biggest flights we'll make if we don't kill civilization first, is a hunt for new legends. We've used up our best ones, and that's dangerous."

"Why don't we look at the countries inside us?" But Johnny wasn't listening much.

"Men can't stand it not to have closed doors and a chance to push at them. Oh, about your Yeti—he might exist. Shaggy anthropoid able to endure severe cold, so rare and clever the explorers haven't tripped over him yet. Wouldn't have to be a carnivore to have big ugly canines—look at the baboons. But if he was active in a Himalayan winter, he'd have to be able to use meat, I think. Mind you, I don't believe any of this, but you can have it as a biological not-im-

possible. How'd he get to Maine?"

"Strayed? Tibet—Mongolia—Arctic ice."

"Maybe." Johnny had begun to enjoy the hypothesis as something to play with during dinner. Soon he was helping along the brute's passage across the continents, and having fun till I grumbled something about alternatives, extraterrestrials. He wouldn't buy that, and got cross. Still hearing Leda scream, I assured him I wasn't watching for little green men.

"Ben, how much do you know about this—Harp?"

"We grew up along different lines, but he's a friend. Dinosaur, if you like, but a friend."

"Hardshell Maine bachelor picks up dizzy young wife—"

"She's not dizzy. Wasn't. Sexy, but not dizzy."

"All right. Bachelor stewing in his own juices for years. Sure he didn't get up on that roof himself?"

"Nuts. Unless all my senses were more paralyzed than I think, there wasn't time."

"Unless they were more paralyzed than you think."

"Come off it! I'm not senile yet . . . What's he supposed to have done with her? Tossed her into the snow?"

"Mph," said Johnny, and finished his coffee. "All right. Some human freak with abnormal strength and the endurance to fossick around in a Maine blizzard

stealing women. I liked the Yeti better. You say you suggested a madman to Ryder yourself. Pity if you had to come all the way here just so I could repeat your own guesswork. To make amends, want to take in a bawdy movie?"

"Love it."

The following day Dr. Kahn made time to see me at the end of the afternoon, so polite and patient that I felt certain I was keeping him from his dinner. He seemed undecided whether to be concerned with the traumas of Harp Ryder's history or those of mine. Mine were already somewhat known to him. "I wish you had time to talk all this out to me. You've given me a nice summary of what the physical events appear to have been, but—"

"Doctor," I said, "it *happened*. I heard the animal. The window *was* smashed—ask the sheriff. Leda Ryder did scream, and when Harp and I got up there together, the dog had been killed and Leda was gone."

"And yet, if it was all as clear as that, I wonder why you thought of consulting me at all, Ben. I wasn't there. I'm just a head-shrinker."

"I wanted . . . Is there any way a delusion could take hold of Harp *and* me, disturb our senses in the same way? Oh, just saying it makes it ridiculous."

Dr. Kahn smiled. "Let's say, difficult."

"Is it possible Harp could have killed her, thrown her out through the window of the *west* bedroom—the snow must have drifted six feet or higher on that side—and then my mind distorted my time sense? So I might've stood there in the dark kitchen all the time it went on, a matter of minutes instead of seconds? Then he jumped down by the shed roof, came back into the house the normal way while I was stumbling upstairs? Oh, hell."

Dr. Kahn had drawn a diagram of the house from my description, and peered at it with placid interest. "Benign" was a word Helen had used for him. He said, "Such a distortion of the time sense would be—unusual . . . Are you feeling guilty about anything?"

"About standing there and doing nothing? I can't seriously believe it was more than a few seconds. Anyway that would make Harp a monster out of a detective story. He's not that. How could he count on me to freeze in panic? Absurd. I'd 've heard the struggle, steps, the window of the west room going up. Could he have killed her and I known all about it at the time, even witnessed it, and then suffered amnesia for that one event?"

He still looked so patient I wished I hadn't come. "I won't say any trick of the mind is impossible, but I might call that one

highly improbable. Academically, however, considering your emotional involvement—"

"I'm not emotionally involved!" I yelled that. He smiled, looking much more interested. I laughed at myself. That was better than poking him in the eye. "I'm upset, Doctor, because the whole thing goes against reason. If you start out knowing nobody's going to believe you, it's all messed up before you open your mouth."

He nodded kindly. He's a good joe. I think he'd stopped listening for what I didn't say long enough to hear a little of what I did say. "You're not unstable, Ben. Don't worry about amnesia. The explanation, perhaps some human intruder, will turn out to be within the human norm. The norm of possibility does include such things as lycanthropic delusions, maniacal behavior, and so on. Your police up there will carry on a good search for the poor woman. They won't overlook that snow-drift. Don't underestimate them, and don't worry about your own mind, Ben."

"Ever seen our Maine woods?"

"No, I go away to the Cape."

"Try it some time. Take a patch of it, say about fifty miles by fifty, that's twenty-five hundred square miles. Drop some eager policemen into it, tell 'em to hunt for something they never saw before and don't want to see, that doesn't want to be found."

"But if your beast is human, human beings leave traces. Bodies aren't easy to hide, Ben."

"In those woods? A body taken by a carnivorous animal? Why not?" Well, our minds didn't touch. I thanked him for his patience and got up. "The maniac responsible," I said. "But whatever we call him, Doctor, he was *there*."

Mike Short picked me up at the Lohman bus station, and told me something of a ferment in Darkfield. I shouldn't have been surprised. "They're all scared, Mr. Dane. They want to hurt somebody." Mike is Jim Short's younger brother. He scrapes up a living with his taxi service and occasional odd jobs at the garage. There's a droop in his shaggy ringlets, and I believe thirty is staring him in the face. "Like old Harp he wants to tell it like it happened and nobody buys. That's sad, man. You been away what, three days? The fuzz was pissed off. You better connect with Mister Sheriff Robart like soon. He climbed all over my ass just for driving you to the bus that day, like I should've known you shouldn't."

"I'll pacify him. They haven't found Mrs. Ryder?"

Mike spat out the car window, which was rolled down for the mild air. "Old Harp he never got such a job of snow-shoveling done

in all his days. By the c'munity, for free. No, they won't find her." In that there was plenty of I-want-to-be-asked, and something more, a hint of the mythology of Mike's generation.

"So what's your opinion, Mike?"

He maneuvered a fresh cigarette against the stub of the last and drove on through tiresome silence. The road was winding between ridged mountains of plowed, rotting snow. I had the window down on my side too for the genial afternoon sun, and imagined a tang of spring. At last Mike said, "You prob'ly don't go along . . . Jim got your ca' out, by the way. It's at your place . . . Well, you'll hear 'em talking it all to pieces. Some claim Harp's telling the truth. Some say he killed her himself. They don't say how he made her disappear. Ain't heard any talk against you, Mr. Dane, nothing that counts. The sheriff's peeved, but that's just on account you took off without asking." His vague, large eyes watched the melting landscape, the ambiguous messages of spring. "Well, I think, like, a demon took her, Mr. Dane. She was one of his own, see? You got to remember, I knew that chick. Okay, you can say it ain't scientific, only there is a science to these things, I read a book about it. You can laugh if you want."

I wasn't laughing. It wasn't my

first glimpse of the contemporary medievalism and won't be my last if I survive another year or two. I wasn't laughing, and I said nothing. Mike sat smoking, expertly driving his 20th-Century artifact while I suppose his thoughts were in the 17th, sniffing after the wonders of the invisible world, and I recalled what Johnny Malcolm had said about the need for legends. Mike and I had no more talk.

Adelaide Simmons was dourly glad to see me. From her I learned that the sheriff and state police had swarmed all over Harp's place and the surrounding countryside, and were still at it. Result, zero. Harp had repeatedly told our story and was refusing to tell it any more. "Does the chores and sets there drinking," she said, "or staring off. Was up to see him yesterday, Mr. Dane—felt I should. Couple days they didn't let him alone a minute, maybe now they've eased off some. He asked me real sharp, was you back yet. Well, I redd up his place, made some bread, least I could do."

When I told her I was going there, she prepared a basket, while I sat in the kitchen and listened. "Some say she busted that window herself, jumped down and run off in the snow, out of her mind. Any sense in that?"

"Nope."

"And some claim she deserted

him. Earlier. Which'd make you a liar. And they say whichever way it was, Harp's made up this crazy story because he can't stand the truth." Her clever hands slapped sandwiches into shape. "They claim Harp got you to go along with it, they don't say how."

"Hypnotized me, likely. Adelaide, it all happened the way Harp told it. I heard the thing too. If Harp is ready for the squirrels, so am I."

She stared hard, and sighed. She likes to talk, but her mill often shuts off suddenly, because of a quality of hers which I find good as well as rare: I mean that when she has no more to say she doesn't go on talking.

I got up to Ryder's Ridge about supptime. Bill Hastings was there. The road was plowed slick between the snow ridges, and I wondered how much of the litter of tracks and crumpled paper and spent cigarette packages had been left by sight-seers. Ground frost had not yet yielded to the mud season, which would soon make normal driving impossible for a few weeks. Bill let me in, with the look people wear for serious illness. But Harp heaved himself out of that armchair, not sick in body at least. "Ben, I heard him last night. Late."

"What direction?"

"North."

"You hear it, Bill?" I set down the basket.

My pint-size friend shook his head. "Wasn't here." I couldn't guess how much Bill accepted of the tale.

Harp said, "What's the basket?—oh. Obligated. Adelaide's a nice woman." But his mind was remote. "It was north, Ben, a long way, but I think I know about where it would be. I wouldn't 've heard it except the night was so still, like everything had quieted for me. You know, they been a-deviling me night and day. Robart, state cops, mess of smart little buggers from the papers. I couldn't sleep, I stepped outside like I was called. Why, he might've been the other side of the stars, the sky so full of 'em and nothing stirring. Cold . . . You went to Boston, Ben?"

"Yes. Waste of time. They want it to be something human, anyhow something that fits the books."

Whittling, Bill said neutrally, "Always a man for the books yourself, wasn't you, Ben?"

I had to agree. Harp asked, "Hadn't no ideas?"

"Just gave me back my own thoughts in their language. We have to find it, Harp. Of course some wouldn't take it for true even if you had photographs."

Harp said, "Photographs be goddamned."

"I guess you got to go," said Bill Hastings. "We been talking about it, Ben. Maybe I'd feel the

same if it was me . . . I better be on my way or supper'll be cold and the old woman raising hell-fire." He tossed his stick back in the woodbox.

"Bill," said Harp, "you won't mind feeding the stock couple, three days?"

"I don't mind. Be up tomorrow."

"Do the same for you some time. I wouldn't want it mentioned anyplace."

"Harp, you know me better'n that. See you, Ben."

"Snow's going fast," said Harp when Bill had driven off. "Be in the woods a long time yet, though."

"You wouldn't start this late."

He was at the window, his lean bulk shutting off much light from the time-seasoned kitchen where most of his indoor life had been passed. "Morning, early. Tonight I got to listen."

"Be needing sleep, I'd think."

"I don't always get what I need," said Harp.

"I'll bring my snowshoes. About six? And my carbine—I'm best with a gun I know."

He stared at me a while. "All right, Ben. You understand, though, you might have to come back alone. I ain't coming back till I get him, Ben. Not this time."

At sunup I found him with Ned and Jerry in the stable. He had lived eight or ten years with

that team. He gave Ned's neck a final pat as he turned to me and took up our conversation as if night had not intervened. "Not till I get him. Ben, I don't want you drug into this ag'inst your inclination."

"Did you hear it again last night?"

"I heard it. North."

The sun was at the point of rising when we left on our snowshoes, like morning ghosts ourselves. Harp strode ahead down the slope to the woods without haste, perhaps with some reluctance. Near the trees he halted, gazing to his right where a red blaze was burning the edge of the sky curtain; I scolded myself for thinking that he was saying goodbye to the sun.

The snow was crusted, sometimes slippery even for our web feet. We entered the woods along a tangle of tracks, including the fat tire-marks of a snow-scooter. "Guy from Lohman," said Harp. "Hired the goddamn thing out to the state cops and hisself with it. Goes pootin' around all over hell, fit to scare everything inside eight, ten miles." He cut himself a fresh plug to last the morning, "I b'lieve the thing is a mite further off than that. They'll be messing around again today." His fingers dug into my arm. "See how it is, don't y'? They ain't looking for what we are. Looking for a dead body to hang onto my neck. And

if they was to find her the way I found—the way I found—"

"Harp, you needn't borrow trouble."

"I know how they think," he said. "Was I to walk down the road beyond Darkfield, they'd pick me up. They ain't got me in shackles because they got no—no body, Ben. Nobody needs to tell me about the law. They got to have a body. Only reason they didn't leave a man here overnight, they figure I can't go nowhere. They think a man couldn't travel in three, four foot of snow . . . Ben, I mean to find that thing and shoot it down . . . We better slant off thisaway."

He set out at a wide angle from those tracks, and we soon had them out of sight. On the firm crust our snowshoes left no mark. After a while we heard a grumble of motors far back, on the road. Harp chuckled viciously. "Bright and early like yesterday." He stared back the way we had come. "They'll never pick that up, without dogs. That son of a bitch Robart did talk about borrying a hound somewhere, to sniff Leda's clothes. More likely give 'em a sniff of mine, now."

We had already come so far that I didn't know the way back. Harp would know it. He could never be lost in any woods, but I have no mental compass such as his. So I followed him blindly, not trying to memorize our trail.

It was a region of uniform old growth, mostly hemlock, no recent lumbering, few landmarks. The monotony wore down native patience to a numbness, and our snowshoes left no more impression than our thoughts.

An hour passed, or more; after that sound of motors faded. Now and then I heard the wind move peacefully overhead. Few bird calls, for most of our singers had not yet returned. "Been in this part before, Harp?"

"Not with snow on the ground, not lately." His voice was hushed and careful. "Summers. About a mile now, and the trees thin out some. Stretch of slash where they was taking out pine four, five years back and left everything a Christly pile of shit like they always do."

No, Harp wouldn't get lost here, but I was well lost, tired, sorry I had come. Would he turn back if I collapsed? I didn't think he could, now, for any reason. My pack with blanket roll and provisions had become infernal. He had said we ought to have enough for three or four days. Only a few years earlier I had carried heavier camping loads than this without trouble, but now I was blown, a stitch beginning in my side. My wrist watch said only nine o'clock.

The trees thinned out as he had promised, and here the land rose in a long slope to the north.

I looked up across a tract of eight or ten acres where the devastation of stupid lumbering might be healed if the hurt region could be let alone for sixty years. The deep snow, blinding out here where only scrub growth interfered with the sunlight, covered the worst of the wreckage. "Good place for wild ras'berries," Harp said quietly. "Been time for 'em to grow back. Guess it was nearer seven years ago when they cut here and left this mess. Last summer I couldn't hardly find their logging road. Off to the left—"

He stopped, pointing with a slow arm to a blurred gray line that wandered up from the left to disappear over the rise of ground. The nearest part of that gray curve must have been four hundred feet away, and to my eyes it might have been a shadow cast by an irregularity of the snow surface; Harp knew better. Something had passed there, heavy enough to break the crust. "You want to rest a mite, Ben? Once over that rise I might not want to stop again."

I let myself down on the butt of an old log that lay tilted toward us, cut because it had happened to be in the way, left to rot because they happened to be taking pine. "Can you really make anything out of that?"

"Not enough," said Harp. "But it could be him." He did not sit by me but stood relaxed with his

load, snowshoes spaced so he could spit between them. "About half a mile over that rise," he said, "there's a kind of gorge. Must've been a good brook, former times, still a stream along the bottom in summer. Tangle of elders and stuff. Couple, three caves in the bank at one spot. I guess it's three summers since I been there. Gloomy goddamn place. There was foxes into one of them caves. Natural caves, I b'lieve. I didn't go too near, not then."

I sat in the warming light, wondering whether there was any way I could talk to Harp about the beast—if it existed, if we weren't merely a pair of aging men with disordered minds. Any way to tell him the creature was important to the world outside our dim little village? That it ought somehow to be kept alive, not just shot down and shoveled aside? How could I say this to a man without science, who had lost his wife and also the trust of his fellow-men?

Take away that trust and you take away the world.

Could I ask him to shoot it in the legs, get it back alive? Why, to my own self, irrationally, that appeared wrong, horrible, as well as beyond our powers. Better if he shot to kill. Or if I did. So in the end I said nothing, but shrugged my pack into place and told him I was ready to go on.

With the crust uncertain under

that stronger sunshine, we picked our way slowly up the rise, and when we came at length to that line of tracks, Harp said matter-of-factly, "Now you've seen his mark. It's him."

Sun and overnight freezing had worked on the trail. Harp estimated it had been made early the day before. But wherever the weight of Longtooth had broken through, the shape of his foot showed clearly down there in its pocket of snow, a foot the size of a man's but broader, shorter. The prints were spaced for the stride of a short-legged person. The arch of the foot was low, but the beast was not actually flat-footed. Beast or man. I said, "This is a man's print, Harp. Isn't it?"

He spoke without heat. "No. You're forgetting, Ben. I seen him."

"Anyhow there's only one."

He said slowly, "Only one set of tracks."

"What d' you mean?"

Harp shrugged. "It's heavy. He could've been carrying something. Keep your voice down. That crust yesterday, it would've held me without no web feet, but he went through, and he ain't as big as me." Harp checked his rifle and released the safety. "Half a mile to them caves. B'lieve that's where he is, Ben. Don't talk unless you got to, and take it slow."

I followed him. We topped the rise, encountering more of that

lumberman's desolation on the other side. The trail crossed it, directly approaching a wall of undamaged trees that marked the limit of the cutting. Here forest took over once more, and where it began, Longtooth's trail ended. "Now you seen how it goes," Harp said. "Any place where he can travel above ground he does. He don't scramble up the trunks, seems like. Look here—he must've got ahold of that branch and swung hisself up. Knocked off some snow, but the wind knocks off so much too you can't tell nothing. See, Ben, he—he figures it out. He knows about trails. He'll have come down out of these trees far enough from where we are now so there ain't no chance of us seeing the place from here. Could be anywhere in a half-circle, and draw it as big as you please."

"Thinking like a man."

"But he ain't a man," said Harp. "There's things he don't know. How a man feels, acts. I'm going on to them caves." From necessity, I followed him . . .

I ought to end this quickly. Prematurely I am an old man, incapacitated by the effects of a stroke and a damaged heart. I keep improving a little—sensible diet, no smoking, Adelaide's care. I expect several years of tolerable health on the way downhill. But I find, as Harp did, that it is even more crippling to lose the trust of

others. I will write here once more, and not again, that my word is good.

It was noon when we reached the gorge. In that place some melancholy part of night must always remain. Down the center of the ravine between tangles of alder, water murmured under ice and rotting snow, which here and there had fallen in to reveal the dark brilliance. Harp did not enter the gorge itself but moved slowly through tree-cover along the left edge, eyes flickering for danger. I tried to imitate his caution. We went a hundred yards or more in that inching advance, maybe two hundred. I heard only the occasional wind of spring.

He turned to look at me, with a sickly triumph, a grimace of disgust and of justification, too. He touched his nose and then I got it also, a rankness from down ahead of us, a musky foulness with an ammoniacal tang and some smell of decay. Then on the other side of the gorge, off in the woods but not far, I heard Longtooth.

A bark, not loud. Throaty, like talk.

Harp suppressed an answering growl. He moved on until he could point down to a black cave-mouth on the opposite side. The breeze blew the stench across to us. Harp whispered, "See, he's got like a path. Jumps down to that flat rock, then to the cave. We'll see

him in a minute." Yes, there were sounds in the brush. "You keep back." His left palm lightly stroked the underside of his rifle barrel.

So intent was he on the opening where Longtooth would appear, I may have been first to see the other who came then to the cave mouth and stared up at us with animal eyes. Longtooth had called again, a rather gentle sound. The woman wrapped in filthy hides may have been drawn by that call or by the noise of our approach.

Then Harp saw her.

He knew her. In spite of the tangled hair, scratched face, dirt, and the shapeless deer-pelt she clutched around herself against the cold, I am sure he knew her. I don't think she knew him, or me. An inner blindness, a look of a beast wholly centered on its own needs. I think human memories had drained away. She knew Longtooth was coming. I think she wanted his warmth and protection, but there were no words in the whimper she made before Harp's bullet took her between the eyes.

Longtooth shoved through the bushes. He dropped the rabbit he was carrying and jumped down to that flat rock snarling, glancing sidelong at the dead woman who was still twitching. If he understood the fact of death, he had no time for it. I saw the massive

overdevelopment of thigh and leg muscles, their springy motions of preparation. The distance from the flat rock to the place where Harp stood must have been fifteen feet. One spear of sunlight touched him in that blue-green shade, touched his thick red fur and his fearful face.

Harp could have shot him. Twenty seconds for it, maybe more. But he flung his rifle aside and drew out his hunting knife, his own long tooth, and had it waiting when the enemy jumped.

So could I have shot him. No one needs to tell me I ought to have done so.

Longtooth launched himself, clawed fingers out, fangs exposed. I felt the meeting as if the impact had struck my own flesh. They tumbled roaring into the gorge, and I was cold, detached, an instrument for watching.

It ended soon. The heavy brownish teeth clenched in at the base of Harp's neck. He made no more motion except the thrust that sent his blade into Longtooth's left side. Then they were quiet in that embrace, quiet all three. I heard the water flowing under the ice.

I remember a roaring in my ears, and I was moving with slow care, one difficult step after another, along the lip of the gorge and through mighty corridors of white and green. With my hard-won detached amusement I sup-

posed this might be the region where I had recently followed poor Harp Ryder to some destination or other, but not (I thought) one of those we talked about when we were boys. A band of iron had closed around my forehead, and breathing was an enterprise needing great effort and caution, in order not to worsen the indecent pain that clung as another band around my diaphragm. I leaned against a tree for thirty seconds or thirty minutes, I don't know where. I knew I mustn't take off my pack in spite of the pain, because it carried provisions for three days. I said once: "Ben, you are lost."

I had my carbine, a golden bough, staff of life, and I recall the shrewd management and planning that enabled me to send three shots into the air. Twice.

It seems I did not want to die, and so hung on the cliff-edge of death with a mad stubbornness. They tell me it could not have been the second day that I fired the second burst, the one that was heard and answered—because, they say, a man can't suffer the kind of attack I was having and then survive a whole night of exposure. They say that when a search party reached me from Wyndham Village (18 miles from Darkfield), I made some garbled speech and fell flat on my face.

I woke immobilized, without

power of speech or any motion except for a little life in my left hand, and for a long time memory was only a jarring of irrelevancies. When that cleared I still couldn't talk for another long deadly while. I recall someone saying with exasperated admiration that with cerebral hemorrhage on top of coronary infarction, I had no damn right to be alive; this was the first sound that gave me any pleasure. I remember recognizing Adelaide and being unable to thank her for her presence. None of this matters to the story, except the fact that for months I had no bridge of communication with the world; and yet I loved the world and did not want to leave it.

One can always ask: What will happen next?

Some time in what they said was June my memory was (I think) clear. I scrawled a little, with the nurse supporting the deadened part of my arm. But in response to what I wrote, the doctor, the nurses, Sheriff Robart, even Adelaide Simmons and Bill Hastings, looked—sympathetic. I was not believed. I am not believed now, in the most important part of what I wish I might say: that there are things in our world that we do not understand, and that this ignorance ought to generate humility. People find this obvious, bromidic—oh, they always have!—and therefore they do not listen, retaining the

pride of their ignorance intact.

Remnants of the three bodies were found in late August, small thanks to my efforts, for I had no notion what compass direction we took after the cut-over area, and there are so many such areas of desolation I couldn't tell them where to look. Forest scavengers, including a pack of dogs, had found the bodies first. Water had moved them too, for the last of the big snow melted suddenly, and for a couple of days at least there must have been a small river raging through that gorge. The head of what they are calling the "lunatic" got rolled downstream, bashed against rocks, partly buried in silt. Dogs had chewed and scattered what they speak of as "the man's fur coat."

It will remain a lunatic in a fur coat, for they won't have it any other way. So far as I know, no scientist ever got a look at the wreckage, unless you glorify the coroner by that title. I believe he was a good vet before he got the

job. When my speech was more or less regained, I was already through trying to talk about it. A statement of mine was read at the inquest—that was before I could talk or leave the hospital. At this ceremony society officially decided that Harper Harrison Ryder, of this township, shot to death his wife Leda and an individual, male, of unknown identity, while himself temporarily of unsound mind, and died of knife injuries received in a struggle with the said individual of unknown, and so forth.

I don't talk about it because that only makes people more sorry for me, to think a man's mind should fail so, and he not yet sixty.

I cannot even ask them: "What is truth?" They would only look more saddened, and I suppose shocked, and perhaps find reasons for not coming to see me again.

They are kind. They will do anything for me, except think about it.

Coming next month . . .

. . . two extraordinary novelets, both of which take place off-Earth and are rich in human and alien detail: **INITIATION** by **Joanna Russ** and **FROM THE MOON, WITH LOVE** by talented newcomer **Neil Shapiro**. Plus a story by **Gahan Wilson**, which is guaranteed to paste a silly grin on the face of our most hard-headed, critical reader, whoever he may be. Next month's books column will be in the capable hands of **James Blish**.

BOOKS



ALL BOOKS OUGHT TO BE MASTERPIECES. The author may choose his genre, his subject, his characters, and everything else, but his book ought to be a masterpiece (major or minor) and failing that, it ought to be good, and failing *that*, it at least ought to show some sign that it was written by a human being.

Robert Merle, Prix Goncourt winner and author of *THE DAY OF THE DOLPHIN* (Simon and Schuster, \$5.95) may be a word-mill for all I know; the book is pure commodity, written by the yard to be bought by the yard. Out of 320 pages the author uses more than fifty to establish that there are dolphins, that they are intelligent, and that these facts interest the U.S. Government. Knowing the temper of his readers (whose delicate mental balance can be upset by the least sign of intelligence or originality) M. Merle introduces scores of characters to talk about dolphins and scores of others to listen to them; and when that runs out, the hero's lab assistants spend two hundred more pages (dear God) quarreling about each other's utterly stereotyped sexual proclivities without,

unfortunately, ever doing anything even remotely indecent. I have been heard to complain that there is not enough characterization in science fiction, but I hereby repent in tears and blood. If characters have to be introduced to do utilitarian things in books—like turning on electric lights—I far and away prefer the lightweight, portable, flexible cardboard cutouts that science fiction writers are so fond of to M. Merle's well-rounded, "realistic," ponderous, wooden dummies. The characters are supposed to be Americans, but they are all French, including two ex-Vassar girls with uvular r's* (ah, those languorous Poughkeepsie summers!) and the plot proper starts on page 200. Everybody talks about the Vietnam war as if he had just heard of it. If the book had been cut by two-thirds, the material about the dolphins kept and the rest sketched in as lightly as possible, this could have been a bearable novel, for M. Merle's dolphins are interesting and likeable charac-

*Your uvula is the dingus that hangs down in front of your tonsils. An uvular r is a liquid, trilled r, quite impossible in English.

ters. It's the old story: a teeny dollop of idea mixed with vast amounts of ultraconventional sludge. Do not be alarmed, nervous readers. Even though the story is about dolphins, it will not hurt you, it is not really science fiction, it is full of recognizable things straight from novel-land, and nothing is real. M. Merle writes like this, by the way, it is very modish and experimental, it is called "run-on sentences," she flung herself down on the bed, I will kill all publishers, she thought.

I sometimes wonder if these vast, content-less, commercial megatheres are not the last degenerate descendants of the nineteenth-century realistic novel—dinosaurs, so to speak, whose great grandpapa is WAR AND PEACE, the panoramic effect of which they try to imitate by sheer size, that being the only thing about realism they can remember.

Only half commodity is BUG JACK BARRON by Norman Spinrad (Avon, 95¢), the other six or seven halves being Spinrad, word-wooze, exasperation, show biz, screaming, and loss of control (the book does everything to excess). Reading it is like trying to fix a watch with a jackhammer. It is a genuinely offensive book—that is, it climbs up off your lap, pulls your ears, breathes in your face, and tries determinedly to

punch you in the nose. It has unmistakably been written by a human being, but it is a bad book, partly because it is an imitation Big Fat Success Novel and partly (I suspect) because the author is not in control of his material, but is in the process of being smothered by it.

BUG is written in a breathlessly baroque style surprisingly like M. Merle's, except for the obscenities. Everybody talks like everybody else (including the villain, who is supposed to be twenty years older than the hero and from a completely different social background). Not only that, they all *think* in the same style and the book is *narrated* in that style; except for a few passages about the hero's ex-wife, there is no rest from the strident, insistent, Johnny-one-note, always-on-the-same-level intensity. If a character picks up an ashtray, that ashtray will have as many verbal rosettes on it as a suicide, or a murder, or any really important thing, and so will the cigarette ashes that drop in it. Many scenes which are moving or charming on their first appearance (like the love scenes, and they *are* love scenes) are considerably less so when they are used as set-pieces the third or fourth time round. I think also that a novel of political intrigue ought to have an intelligible intrigue in it, and after a third reading I still cannot tell who is doing what to whom and

why (most of the uncertainty revolves around Sara Westerfeld, Barron's ex-wife). Moreover there ought to be a real villain in it, and Benedict Howards (the mad millionaire of the book) is not even a stereotype but only a villain-shaped hole crammed with super-high-gear prose (no commas, even) which somehow misses making anything of him at all, not even a conventional gesture.

Algis Budrys has noted that *BJB* moves in and out of the symbolic, and I suspect that's what's wrong. This is one way of not being in control of your material. Passionately, illogically, and spasmodically the book puts forward certain moral ideas, which I propose to treat seriously, as they are neither trivial nor frivolously presented. They might be summarized as follows: (1) Everybody adores power, especially women. (2) Death is worse than anything. (3) Since nobody lives up to conventional moral standards, nobody has any standards. (4) Everyone can be bought. Now I agree with the last of these, but with none of the others, the offensive words being "everybody," "anything," and "any." If death is worse than anything, people ought not to risk their lives or commit suicide, but they do both—very often, in fact. And (beyond the needs of self-protection) some people adore power, some do not, some are afraid of it, some are

sober about it, some don't know anything about it, and so forth. As for number three, it is only the first stage of disillusionment and a big mistake in practical affairs; there are the things people believe and the things they think they ought to believe, and the latter are usually the more destructive. I agree with Jack Barron's "Big Secret" (it is really the most open of all secrets)—i.e. that every man has his price. To have your price means that you can be pleased, that you have needs you must satisfy, that you can be hurt and therefore coerced, in short that you are a human being and not an invulnerable superman. But the subject takes too long; George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* and the preface thereto are recommended reading. With Shaw, I would say that every man's having his price, far from being a scandal or a moral horror, is an indispensable condition for any kind of human society and that it is ridiculous to despise people for what is obviously as necessary and natural a part of them as their arms and legs. The real question about a man's price is not whether he has one but how high it is and in what coin it must be paid. People who cannot be bought by anything (pleasure, happiness, creation, others' happiness, life, freedom) have a name. They are called fanatics. Also recommended is Erich Fromm's distinction between self-

aggrandizement, self-abasement, and self-love.

In fact, *BJB* is not about power at all—the conflict in the book never gets beyond lines like “Nobody crosses Benedict Howards!” or “Nobody owns Jack Barron!” which would be downright silly in the context of a real fight. The book is really about seduction, glamor, corruption, mana, magical essences—in short, *vanity*. One thing Mr. Spinrad understands inside out is entertainment as an industry and the fantasies bred by celebrity; *BJB* is a hall of mirrors. There is only one real character in the novel and the others stand around him in adoring attitudes; even the villain is there only to serve as an enlarging mirror—if Jack can take on *Benedict Howards*, what a giant-killer he must be! I think this is why Howards is so unreal, and why nobody in the book is ever genuinely cruel or genuinely cold, just as nobody is ever sad, or quiet, or kind. Howards’ “paranoia” (the author ought to look that word up) is self-obsession, just as Jack Barron (who would be intolerable in real life) is endlessly self-obsessed and incapable of seeing any other character in the book as real, just as the author shows over and over—perhaps without meaning to make so much of it here—the paradox of celebrity and fake power. The rock star who makes thousands of girls

scream is surely a god, but the girls would not be there if they did not want to scream; nothing is being done to them, since they are doing it to themselves. This is the subject Spinrad can write about. But power as money, anonymous power, legal power, real competition, compromise, coercion, the weighing of real risks, the power to make people do what they really don’t want to do—these are quite outside the scope of the novel. A character in *Death of a Salesman* tells Willy Loman, “My son doesn’t have to be well-liked because he has something to sell,” and these are the cruelest lines in the play. They are also the most hard-headed. They have more to do with power than anything in Norman Spinrad’s romantic, half-innocent, youthfully bouncy, exasperatingly schlocky and ultimately silly book.

Measured against the preceding works, Jack Vance’s *EMPHYRIO* (Doubleday, \$4.95) like a star i’ the darkest night sticks fiery off indeed. Mr. Vance has written a fine book. It is very strange to glance back from this eerie, transparent cockleshell of a novel, so much stronger than it seems (it’s made entirely of forcefields) and so much faster than you’d think (it’s faster-than-light and has a reactionless drive), to see the chrome-finned Cadillac of *BUG JACK BARRON* fighting to keep at

ninety on the curves, and still further back Robert Merle's version of the Merrimac wallowing badly in heavy seas and finally capsizing.

Science fiction, like all literature, usually tries to make the strange familiar, but Mr. Vance makes the familiar strange. One would swear he had read Bert Brecht and decided to produce a novel that would be one extended *Verfremdungseffekt*.^{*} He does it, too. Reading *EMPHYRIO* is like looking at the world through the wrong end of a telescope—I don't mean that everything is small but that in some indescribable way everything is *set at a distance*, and this combination of strange things seeming familiar and familiar things suddenly becoming strange is the oddest and the finest in the world. The cover artist (who understands this) has put a homely, commonplace kitchen next to a set of ruined Corinthian columns, and the odd thing is that they obviously belong together. The first chapter of the book is misleading, for *EMPHYRIO* is not an adventure story but a *bildungsroman*^{**} that describes a perfect curve from beginning to end. It is

^{*} Usually translated as "alienation effect." It might be better rendered (as Brecht has done) as *distancing*, or the framing effect, or the effect you get by putting something in quotation marks.

^{**} A novel of the formation of a character, or the process of passing from childhood to adulthood, making oneself into a person.

very slight on the surface, cool and quiet throughout, without any of the sourness of *EYES OF THE OVERWORLD*. Mr. Vance's novel about the seven demon princes suffered from a mismatching of plot and mood, but here the story and the people are entirely at one. I really cannot do it justice. Mr. Vance knows about childhood, grief, love, social structure, idealism, and loss, but none of these breaks the perfect surface of the book; everything is cool, funny, and recognizable while at the same time everything is melancholy, real, and indescribably strange. There are veins of pure gold. The seven-year-old hero, after seeing a puppet play, "had come to suspect that the puppets were stolen children, whipped until they acted and danced with exact precision: an idea investing the performance with a horrid fascination." Or "I watched a Damaran walk; it walked with *soft feet*, as if its feet hurt." (*Italics mine.*) Except for the very beginning (which might easily have been omitted) the tone is perfectly controlled. What is one to say of a puppet play the title of which is "Virtuous Fidelity to an Ideal Is the Certain Highroad to Financial Independence"? Or of an author whose ear is so sure that among names like Ambroy, Undle, and Foelgher, he can serenely place a district called Riverside Park? Others grunt and

heave to sweat out sophomoric diatribes against organized religion; Mr. Vance merely produces a Temple Leaper who asks the hero's father severely whether he has lately leapt to the glory of Finuka. Even the "happy" ending of the book is curiously abrupt and somehow sad; what remains is not the euphoria of a successful revolution but the memory of two boys watching the sunset from Dunkum's Heights and dreaming of riches, the exact and effortless taking-apart of a whole social system, the old puppeteer (his puppets are living creatures) who says, "The years come fast. Some morning they'll find me lying stark, with the puppets climbing over me, peering in my mouth, tweaking my ears"

BEST SF: 1968 edited by Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss (Putnam's, \$4.95) is a fair mixed bag of stories framed by an Introduction and Afterword that indirectly—and unfortunately—lead one to expect more from the stories than they manage to give. The book does a great service to readers by reprinting four reviews of *2001*: Lester del Rey's, Samuel Delany's, Ed Emshwiller's, and Leon Stover's. The book is moderately funny, moderately interesting, and, well—moderately everything. It's hard to know what to say about a collection in which nothing is particularly good but

nothing is bad. One of Brian Aldiss's psychedelic-war stories is here, well done, although I have begun to have had enough of the whole series; there is also a story by a new writer, David Masson, which presents two fascinating ideas but fails to connect them fictionally: mood-weather ("Insecure, rather sad feeling today and tomorrow, followed by short-lived griefs") and "poiks"—areas that have become mosaics of different eras, geographically contiguous, into which people can get lost. I found "Final War" by K. M. O'Donnell quite good, and the collection will certainly be worth getting when it appears in paperback. It leans toward the obvious and toward stories which have one good, clear, conventional idea: Asimov's "Segregationist" (robots), Kit Reed's "Golden Acres" (old-age homes), Stephen Goldin's "Sweet Dreams, Melissa" (computer psychology) and two technical puzzles, Mack Reynolds' "Criminal in Utopia" and Bob Shaw's "Appointment on Prila" (the first solves its problem; the second only pulls a rabbit out of a hat). There's also a sprinkling of the falsely profound, though I ought to admit that Robert Sheckley's story, "Budget Planet," is out of its proper context, and that I have been told it is not only funny but subtle in Mr. Sheckley's novel, from which it has been untimely ripped. Perhaps it's because I

was brought up with no religion at all that I detest the science-fiction tropism towards re-writing Christianity from what one might call the village-atheist point of view. Although "Budget Planet" and Fritz Leiber's "One Station on the Way" are colorful and active enough, there seems to me to be no point in flogging dead fundamentalist doctrines so late in the day.* That alone is not enough point for a story. Robert Silverberg's "To the Dark Star" hangs a lot of bizarrerie on a very slender thread; it seems oddly gratuitous, as if the author had finished the story before he decided what its theme was. There is also a well-written story by John D. MacDonald, but its subject (the man who hallucinates days of life at the moment of death) has been public property for some time, e.g. "The Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" and "Mr. Arcularis."

**A gorgeous instance of the falsely profound is an irresistible story, probably written tongue-in-cheek (I'm afraid I don't remember the author), in which a group of space explorers find out that the universe is really the effluent of a huge flush toilet. For reasons unknown to me, one kills himself, several go mad, and the one character left sits around brooding about The Horror Of It All.*

K. M. O'Donnell's **THE EMPTY PEOPLE** (Lancer 75¢) is a well-written book which I do not understand at all. As far as I can tell, what seem to be the lives or fantasies of various people are really the hallucinations of a man whose brain cancer has been removed by heroic surgery and whose brain has been, so to speak, re-wired. The book is the universe inside his skull; three characters have been captured by aliens (a situation deliberately derived from trashy s.f.) and are put to different tasks. One waits; one pursues; one flees. There are constant promises that the metaphysical mysteries raised throughout will be cleared up at the end and the meaning of the insistent symbolism finally revealed, but the only thing that happens is that the cancer patient dies. Mr. O'Donnell may be using his plot as an excuse for disconnected fantasies, or he may not have mastered his method yet, or it may be a method I cannot understand. The book has the air of being something that was either cut after it was written or that never got itself properly written in the first place. I remain baffled.

—JOANNA RUSS



It was Duckworth who finally saw the one answer to the "trouble" in Vietnam; the only catch was that the answer was infinitely more frightening than the problem.

A MATTER OF TIME AND PLACE

by Larry Eisenberg

I WAS IN DUCKWORTH'S LAB one afternoon, boring him with the details of a new computer program I'd written, when I heard a radio flash on a sniper shooting several people at a Southern campus. Although Duckworth had been pretending to be wholly absorbed in a spectrophotometric measurement, he too caught the message. His black eyes lifted to mine and he shook his head sadly.

"It's just too much for me," I said. "One violent act follows another."

"All a matter of time and place," said Duckworth gently.

For a moment I was annoyed.

"I suppose that's meant to sound profound," I said, "but the message eludes me."

"Simply this," said Duckworth. "Take that same sniper out of his

tree on that campus, and put him in a tree in an Asian jungle, and his actions would become socially desirable. In fact, he might earn himself a Congressional Medal of Honor."

I nodded dumbly, for Duckworth's logic had me stumped, momentarily. Later, over a cocktail at the faculty bar, I pursued the point.

"Your argument smacks of sophistry," I said. "You might as well claim that a man setting fire to a theater would be performing a socially useful act if he were lighting the stove at home."

"I'll go one step further," said Duckworth. "Ideas, suggestions, and proposals that sound silly to you at this university, might be justifiably acclaimed elsewhere."

He never got to elaborate on

this point, because a special delivery letter arrived at that very moment. It was postmarked from the White House. Duckworth read it through with a grave face.

"My country needs me," he said, placing his hand over the breast pocket in his white smock. "How can I refuse?"

"Even if it means participating in a dirty war?" I said tartly.

Duckworth shrugged.

"I have my motives," he said, and I walked away, fuming.

Duckworth was given an indefinite leave of absence. The students had mixed feelings about his departure. Placards blossomed in front of his laboratory building, some reading, "Don't Do It, Duckworth." Others, including the one I carried, read, "Duckworth is an Establishment Fink."

In several months, Duckworth was just a memory on campus, and a dim one at that. But the personality of my old comrade-in-arms was still vivid in my mind. I wondered if I had judged him too harshly and what he was doing at his new post. As if some telepathic link had been established, a note arrived from Duckworth, almost pleading with me to pay him a visit.

I agonized over this invitation. My affection for Duckworth was still strong, but I feared that his new research might rouse violent feelings. But I was also profoundly curious. I decided to go and

Duckworth was overjoyed to see me.

"I've missed you," he said. "In this city of snow-white buildings, I'm surrounded by clutches of yes-men."

"I've missed you, too," I admitted. "And I hope you'll be returning to the Ivied Halls of Academe pretty soon."

Duckworth smiled.

"Sooner than you might think," he said.

He insisted on escorting me about the grounds of the enclave where he worked, despite the tough security regulations. We stopped in front of an enormous plane hangar, and Duckworth led me past the uniformed guards.

"In here you'll find one of my hottest projects."

I stretched my neck upward and stared in disbelief at a huge metal cylinder which was inside an even larger glass bell.

"My God," I said. "What is it?"

"A variant of the Tibetan torture drum," said Duckworth. "It produces a vibratory note so violently painful to the auditory nerve, that we daren't even test it."

"You have a use for this drum?" I said grimly.

"A lovely one," said Duckworth. "We plan to set up an enormous parabolic reflector in a jungle clearing. The torture drum will be set at its focal point and the striking mechanism activated. Every

guerrilla, for miles around, will find his nerves turned to quivering jelly."

I shuddered.

"It's gruesome and a perversion of science, but it's ingenious," I admitted.

Duckworth coughed.

"There's one bug," he said.

"And that is?"

"Notice," said Duckworth, "that the drum is inside a glass bell. The air within the bell is pumped out and a near vacuum exists. That, of course, is to prevent accidental drum vibrations shattering our own people."

"Of course," I said.

"The drum," resumed Duckworth, "must be transported inside a total vacuum. But before it is placed in front of the parabolic reflector, we have to get the damned drum out of the glass bell. But if we lose the vacuum, the drum will be excited to vibration."

I began to chuckle.

"Then you can't use the damned thing?"

Duckworth nodded.

"For the foreseeable future," he admitted.

We walked on to another huge hangar. The guards here were carrying submachine guns, and they leveled them at me as we approached. I slipped behind Duckworth and he produced a pass. They muttered unhappily but let us through.

"You know," I said to Duck-

worth, "I couldn't even get clearance to enter a post office."

He ignored my words and pointed to what seemed to be a multistage space vehicle inside.

"A space platform," said Duckworth. "Would you like to know what it's for?"

"Are you allowed to tell me?"

"My plan," said Duckworth, "is to mount a huge lens on this platform. The focal length will be three hundred miles."

"Don't tell me," I said. "The lens will be in a stationary orbit at the same distance over the enemy's jungle hideouts."

"Precisely," said Duckworth. "An electronically controlled shutter, triggered by telemetered signal, will enable us to focus the Sun's rays on any desired site. Instant conflagration will follow."

"Perfectly hideous," I said. "But it may work."

"Not really," said Duckworth.

"Why not?"

"Because the enemy has prepared an enormous mobile reflecting mirror which, if properly placed, would burn up our space platform."

"What a pity," I said sarcastically.

Duckworth's shoulders drooped.

"Have you anything else to show me?" I said.

He pulled at his lower lip.

"Not hardware," he said. "But I have a new strategic concept."

I was blunt.

"I don't quite see you in *that* role," I said.

Duckworth stiffened.

"Then hear this," he said. He looked about to see if we were free of eavesdroppers. "You recall the concept of Entropy?" he said.

"Entropy," I said didactically, "is a measure of the disorder in a physical system. A decrease in Entropy means an increase in order."

"A-plus," said Duckworth. "As you well know, the *total entropy* of a system can never decrease. Conversely, the total order can never increase. More order in one spot means less elsewhere."

"So?"

"We in the United States," said Duckworth, "have built a highly efficient, beautifully organized community. We have increased order in our own land to an enormous degree. But by the law of Entropy, this increase in order must be offset elsewhere by a similar decrease in order."

"Would this explain our troubles in Vietnam?" I said.

"It would. To end that war, one would have to generate some disorder at home."

"And disorder will diminish abroad. Since it won't happen," I said, "it's all hopeless."

We walked on in silence. Overhead the Sun had begun to set, and the vast cloud banks were delicately tinted with roseate streaks.

"Come home, Duckworth," I said. "Your strength lies in pure research, not in destruction."

He shook his head.

"Not until I've finished my stint here."

All at once I caught on.

"Of course," I said. "It's your theory of stupid things being right at the proper time and place. But it won't work. And some might call it treason."

"Would you?"

I grasped his hand, shook it warmly.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Just defend my good name when someone attacks me on campus."

Back on campus, I plunged into the daily routine of harassing students who didn't enter their names in the computer log book. And then a shocking thing occurred. Campus eruptions broke out all over the country. Blacks rioted in the ghettos. Even teachers went on prolonged disruptive strikes. Shortly thereafter, peace talks began in Paris. And hard upon that, Duckworth returned to campus.

I tried to be discreet and avoid mentioning his last project. But one night, after three stiff shots of Jack Daniels, my tongue loosened.

"That last one bring you home?"

Duckworth speared the olive

out of his martini and popped it into his mouth. He chewed it with great relish.

"You're quite right," he said, after he'd ejected the pit. "I came back when my last scheme succeeded."

"But you didn't do anything to make it happen, did you?"

"Of course not," he said. "That's why I became so frightened."

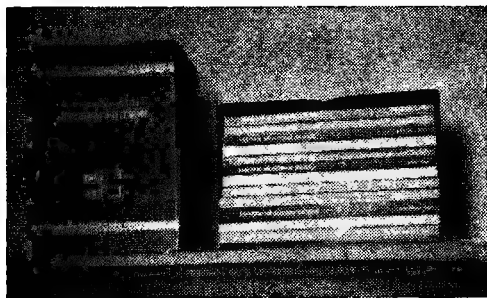
"Frightened?"

"Look at it this way," he said. "For the first time in the history of mankind, the world has within

its grasp the chance for a durable peace, a peace without foreseeable end. And all of it depends on us. It's up to America with her capacity for unlimited, unending domestic violence and disorder, and the unique know-how to carry it out."

"Don't worry, Duckworth," I said. "The world can count on us, we'll never let them down."

And glasses held high, we drank to that universal dream, again and again.



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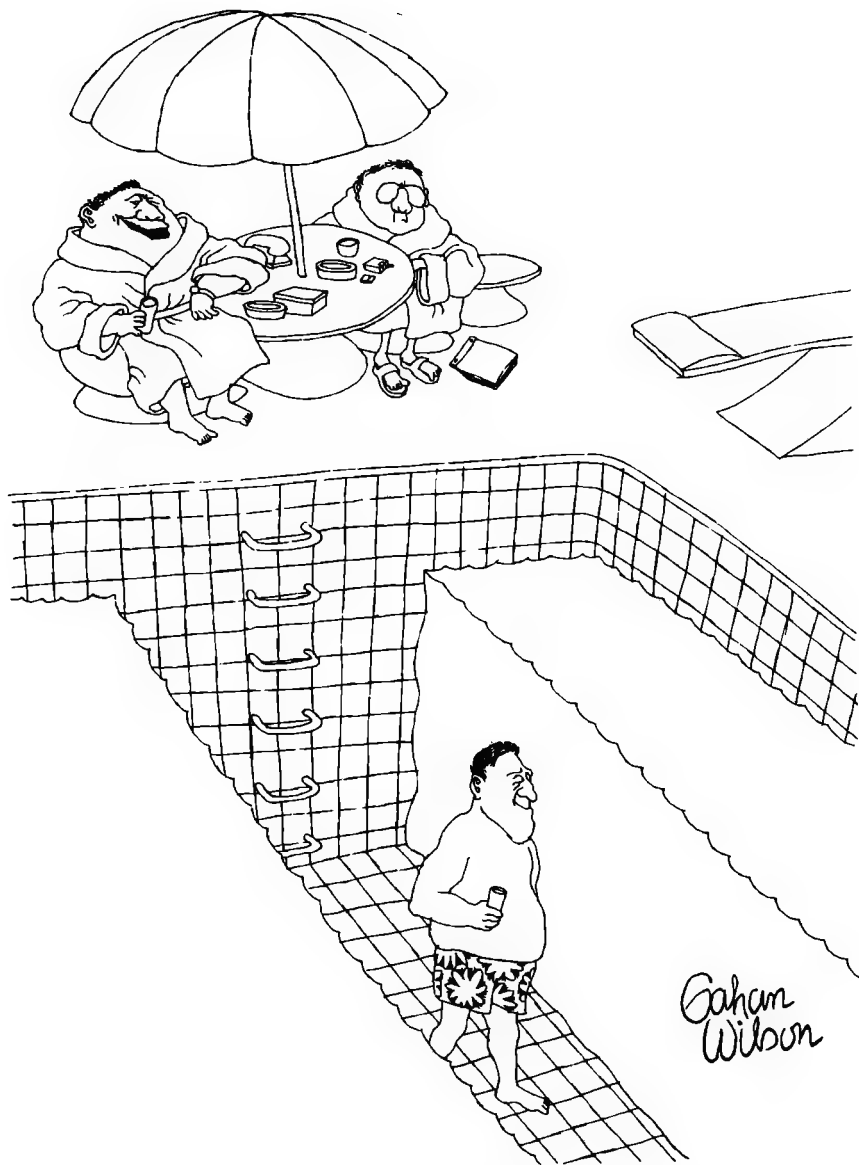
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E PLURIBUS SOLO

by Bruce McAllister

"Haliaetus leucocephalus is yet another species whose extinction is inevitable . . ."

*—The National Geographic,
March, 1966.*

NO, YOUR HONOR, THE PHONE call that got Tom Kipling out of the Smithsonian building that night was legit. Hospital called to say his wife was having her kid prematurely—so Tom left, said he would get back in a few hours. But I'm sure the "hunter" who killed Sam was tapping the wires, heard the hospital, and decided it was time for him to make his play.

Anyway, as I was saying, this is the scene: Tom Kipling has been gone for ten minutes, so I'm the only guard there. I'm in a badly lit corridor—the one where the room with Sam's cage is. I

step out of the john, and a bullet catches me in the calf. Pistol bullet. Felt like a comet in my legbones, then my spine. I went down, managed to crawl into the closest room—which was Sam's, a big room with his big wire cage, and feeding facilities, and storage cabinets.

I just sit there for a minute—the first Smithsonian Institute security guard ever shot on duty. Would almost feel embarrassed if it wasn't for the pain making me so mad. I get up on one leg, reach up, snap the light on, and look around the room. There's Sam, blinking in the light, ruffling

his feathers like he's yawn-stretching—and it takes me about two seconds to see that the bullet has something to do with Sam. I remember someone tried to slip him poisoned meat two years ago, and before that someone snuck a coral snake into his cage. That's why the Smithsonian agreed in the first place to house him and protect him.

So I manage to stand up, unholster my pistol, open the door a crack, slip out quickly, turn sideways to offer less of a target, take quick aim—

I figure the pistol-man will fire once, miss, and I'll have him.

The blast from his *shotgun* hits me like a wasp nest. God knows I should be blinded, but I'm not. I still have hold of my pistol, but there is less visibility down the corridor than I figured, so I duck back in Sam's room.

As I duck into the room I see this flash of white down near the end of the corridor where the guy is. I hear a flutter-sound too, but I don't pay any attention. All I think about the white is that the guy is getting ready to blind me with a flashlight or something.

The guy's footsteps start coming down the corridor, and I wait inside the room for the right chance. The footsteps get loud—too loud, but I don't see what he's up to . . .

The fluttering noise keeps up too, and gets louder, but I still

don't pay any attention. When the guy's footsteps are about halfway down the corridor, loud as hell, I crack the door again, stick my pistol out, and squint one eye past the doorframe.

But before I can pull the trigger, the white thing hits my arm. What do I think? I don't think *anything*! What are you going to think when a crazy unknown flash of white hits your arm and starts to rip it off like fire.

The damn white thing is a bird. About half the size of Sam. Its talons skewer into my arm like corkscrews, and I scream. My pistol flies out into the corridor—and I hear the guy pick it up.

If that bird gets anywhere near my face—but it doesn't. I'm doubled-over in pain, and just happen to be protecting my face in that position.

There's blood on my face though—from my arm—but I see the man clearly when he walks into the room. He takes a quick look at Sam—who's ruffling his feathers—and then at me, where I am on the floor, with the white bird latched onto my arm like a vice with feathers.

The man is dressed like a safari dude, with one of those Frank Buck jackets—linen-duster type—and he's carrying a pistol, holster, shotgun, two ammo belts, and a leather wrapping around one arm. But no hat—he's bald.

The guy whistles sharp like a bird. His white bird lets go of my arm, hovers over me for a second, then flaps quietly over to the guy's arm, the leather-wrapped one. He puts a small leather helmet—or hat—on the bird, and the bird calms down all the way. The hat covers its eyes.

"I don't want *you*," the guy says.

I know for sure now—maybe because he has the white bird with him—that he wants Sam. I've never really thought about Sam before, you see. Sam has always been just another museum piece—since I've never been a nature buff, or Audubon Society member. But I start thinking real quick about how old Sam is, and what he means by being the last of his kind, and I start feeling that maybe I'd chance another bullet in the leg to save Sam from the safari bastard.

"I hope," the guy says, "you don't think I intend just to *shoot* Sam."

I don't say anything. My lips are sticky, salty.

Then I understand. I look at the man's white bird—yes, it's a falcon, though a small one—and I understand. But I think that Sam will have a chance against the white runt. But that falcon sure seemed big enough when it grabbed onto my arm.

The guy goes over to Sam's twenty-by-twenty-foot cage. His

falcon still has its leather blinder-thing on, and with the bird still clamped on his arm he chases Sam out of the cage into the room. I just lie on the floor—trying to get my dinner resettled in my gut before tackling any other job.

Then the guy takes the leather hat off his bird, and the falcon screeches like a banshee. It jumps into the air.

Sam tries to fly. Crashes into the wall.

"I'm a hunter, sure," the guy shouts to me as the falcon flies at Sam. "But I wouldn't be doing all this on my own. Chance of a murder rap, just for a trophy? You gotta be kidding!"

Sam has tried to fly again. Crashes into another wall. The falcon swoops down, hits Sam, and there's a flurry of those small white feathers from around Sam's "bald" spot. Some feathers turn red.

Louder than the screaming of both birds, and their thumping wings, the guy shouts at me: "I'm not saying your bald eagle isn't a great trophy. Never bagged one myself, of course. The damn conservationists have given immunity to about every single bird . . ."

He stops talking, turns to watch his falcon hover over Sam. Sam is hanging on the side of his cage now, his talons in the wires. Just hanging, like he's tired.

The white falcon rears back in the air, swoops up, then down,

talons toward Sam. Sam tries to throw his own talons up, but they catch in the cage wires, and Sam ends up using his beak like a short sword. The falcon hits, bloodies Sam's left eye, and swoops around the room again, continues to swoop.

"I suppose," the guy shouts, "my Bird has the advantage. He's a mutant, of course—the last white gyrfalcon died out fifty years ago. Bird cost me \$30,000—radiation treatments on his parents, plus his special nutrition and drugs . . . Hey, yeah, Bird's also got the advantage of mobility in this room. Sam just can't work his wings."

The falcon dives, swipes Sam across the chest, and doubles back toward the ceiling.

"Bird's been bred and trained to kill—legally mammals, illegally other birds . . . Practically machine-precision. But beautiful, don't you think?"

The guy looks away at his Bird—real proud.

I just sit there for a minute. What do I say? What do I do? I decide that movement is more important than talk, so I start to slide real slowly on my butt toward the "hunter's" leg. He seems to be watching the bird-fight.

But his pistol trains on me again, and he says, "Excuse the cliché, but I wouldn't try anything if I were you. Just don't move. You might get a talon or so stuck

in your face. Bird doesn't like obstructions or distractions."

Sam is now on the back of a chair not far from the cage. His wings are arched up around him like big shoulders—he's as ready as he'll ever be.

The falcon shoots up toward the high ceiling, bundles itself into a ball, and drops. At the same time Sam's wings grab the air, lift him a foot in the air, and his talons fly up toward Bird like a hundred little plows.

The falcon hits, catches the eagle's talons in its own, they lock, and then Bird strikes up into Sam's neck with its beak.

Sam screams, wraps himself and Bird in his big dark wings—just like they were arms—and then tries to get untangled. Sam falls to the floor like a sack. Bird fans the air, lifts up, and is ready to strike again.

The "hunter" is barely keeping half an eye on me, and I figure I can at least *try* to save Sam—and the "hunter" won't kill me if I try without touching him. It isn't the greatest idea in the world, but I start taking my left shoe off very slowly . . .

I throw the shoe at Bird, hoping Sam will attack at the same time. The shoe hits one of the falcon's wings, spinning it. Sam lunges into the air, but too slowly. Bird manages to escape to the ceiling again, where it hovers—mad as a hornet.

I look at the blood covering Sam's left eye, and I get flashes in my head about the bullfights, and cockfights, and bullbaiting back in my grandfather's day.

The "hunter" chuckles at me and says, "Now Bird feels challenged. 'Last Bald Eagle' *plus* 'Human Being,' both versus 'White Bird.' He'd thank you for equalizing the odds—but he's too busy."

The falcon has plummeted again. Its claws catch again in Sam's left eye, and hold on. The only sound from Sam is the thrashing of his wings—against the air, the falcon, and the pain I'm sure. There is no white on Sam's head now—just red—and his yellow beak is streaming blood too, looks like a crazy party favor.

I start to creep toward the guy, thinking I can trip him with my one good leg and an arm.

But he turns. "Hey, I'm not as easygoing as Bird. I might just stop your other leg too, if you move again." He whips his head back to watch the fight.

The falcon dives, blood sprays from Sam's neck, and the guy shouts, "Like I said, I'm not taking full credit—or any of the tab—on this expedition. Don't even get to keep the eagle when Bird is finished."

I start thinking: Hired by whom? A Nazi group? Some wealthy eccentric? Wealthy anti-American eccentric? Red nation? But I just can't figure it out.

Sam screams, rips at Bird with his beak, catches Bird on the wingtip, but Bird slips out.

"According to my employer," the guy shouts more, "this is justice. After all, North Americans have invaded his veldt for years—a million safaris, poachings, to bag *their* trophies. His veldt is minus a couple hundred species of animals now. And he thinks animals are just like oppressed peoples. Justice. Eye for eye, species for species, bird for bird."

Bird's beak is red now too. The blood is like jelly on the falcon's face.

"American hunters killed my employer's wildebeests, 'secretary birds,' the big cats, et multa cetera. He doesn't like me much either—since I'm an American hunter myself—but the job and price were right, so I was hired."

I mutter, "Morooswamy!"—the name of the aggressive Prime Minister of the Mideast Triad.

The "hunter" laughs and says, "Of course not. I said the *veldt*."

Yes, now I understand what he means. His employer is Jackson—Mathew Chana Jackson—the so-called "multi-breed," who I remember as being the guy who split from here twenty years ago and headed for Africa, to try and organize a "Rainbow Union," a sanctuary state for all "colors," minorities. I remember Jackson was recently made Chief of Federal

Police in Kenya, but his Union never came off. Wasn't it that Africa really didn't want him, and nobody from North America even bothered to follow him across the Atlantic, since things here got better for minorities . . . ? That's what the papers said, anyway.

Sam leaps in the air—like a rooster—tries to come down on Bird. But the falcon shoots like a big marble across the floor, and swoops up to the ceiling again.

The "hunter" says, "I suppose you get the picture. The boss already has one of the best taxidermists alive ready for when—" A twin screech from the birds stop his talk.

The falcon is diving. Sam lifts one wing, curling it over his bloody head.

"—And in less than a week Sam will be on his teak mantelpiece." The "hunter" laughs. "Maybe even with a justice emblem—those weighing-scales and the blind woman—on Sam's base!"

Then the "hunter" seems to remember something important. He swears. He says, "Damn Bird! Boss will have my hide if Bird tears Sam any more than he already has!"

The the guy steps forward at the birds, and whistles sharp—just like the falcon. Bird stops tearing at Sam's wings, and returns straightway to the "hunter's" arm, to the leather wrapping, which

Bird grabs ahold of obediently. The "hunter" puts the blinder-hat on Bird, then raises his pistol to take aim at Sam's bloody chest from about four feet. Both Sam and the "hunter" freeze . . .

I lunge, kicking the side of his knee with my one good foot. His pistol barrel tips up, fires, the bullet hits the cage wires, then the far wall.

From the jolt I give him, he pitches toward Sam—and for a moment I think and hope Sam will jump on him.

But Sam reaches out instead, and rips the blinded falcon from the arm-leather—rips the falcon away almost daintily—and then tears Bird's head off with his beak. Blood doesn't spurt, just runs over the floor, over the "hunter's" arm.

I'm shouting, but I can't move worth hell. The "hunter" is shouting too. He grabs at Sam, but Sam's beak takes one of his fingers just like it was a worm.

I scramble and reach the "hunter's" pistol on the floor. I'm shaking like I am having a baby or something.

I look up, see the falcon's head hanging from its neck like a big wet ruby. I see Sam flutter once, twice, then his last time. Have you ever seen a bird twitch to death? Like a humble dance, head hanging down to one side—kind of embarrassed-like? So Sam dies right there by the "hunter."

The "hunter's" right eye is

bloody. He looks like a cyclops. He's moaning, and his other eye is blinded by blood.

I raise the pistol. I don't want to raise it—I'm afraid of my own thoughts, thoughts about how all our coins have bald eagles on them, how the national seal has an eagle on it, how there was a gold coin called an "Eagle", how Sam himself—because he was the last bald eagle in the world—was

named "Sam", for "Uncle Sam", and how his mate—before she died five years ago—was called "Samantha", "Aunt Samantha."

But I raise the gun anyway.

No, Your Honor, I wouldn't say I did it out of anything patriotic. I was just plain mad. And sick. I threw up right after I shot him.

Well, yes, I suppose I might call it "temporary insanity."

Oh, you think I should?

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THIS MONTH'S COVER is the first of a series of six new robot paintings done for F&SF by Mel Hunter. The remaining five will be published during the next two years. You can begin a collection of this superb robot series by ordering this month's cover with the coupon above.

Gene Wolfe's first story for F&SF is a whimsical automotive tale which explains a lot of things about cars and gas stations, such as why the latter are listed under "service stations" in our yellow pages. Mr. Wolfe is thirty-eight, an engineer; his stories have appeared in ORBIT II and ORBIT III.

CAR SINISTER

by Gene Wolfe

Q: What do you get if you cross a racoon with a greyhound?

A: A furry brown animal that climbs trees and seats forty people.

—Grade School Joke

THERE ARE THREE GAS STATIONS in our village. I suppose before I get any deeper into this I should explain that it really is a village, and not a suburb. There are two grocery stores (privately owned and so small my wife has to go to both when she wants to bake a cake), a hardware store with the post office in one corner, and the three gas stations.

Two of these are operated by major oil companies, and for convenience I'll call them the one I go to and the other one. I have a credit card for the one I go to, which is clean, well run, and trustworthy on minor repairs. I have no reason to think the other

one is any different, in fact it looks just the same except for the colors on the sign, and I've noticed that the two of them exchange small favors when the need arises. They are on opposite sides of the main road (it is the kind of road that was called a highway in the nineteen thirties), and I suppose both managers feel they're getting their share.

The third station isn't like that at all; it looks quite different and sells a brand of gasoline I've never seen anywhere else. This third station is at the low end of the village, run by a man called Bosko. Bosko appears stupid although I don't think he really is, and always wears an army fatigue hat and a grey coat that was once part of a bus driver's uniform. Another man—a boy, really—helps Bosko. The boy's name is Bubber; he is usually even dirtier than Bosko, and has something wrong

with the shape of his head.

I own a Rambler American and, as I said, always have it serviced at one of the major-brand stations. I might add that I work in the city, driving thirty miles each way, and the car is very important to me; so I would never have taken it to Bosko's if it hadn't been for that foolish business about my credit card. I lost it, you see. I don't know where. Naturally I telegraphed the company, but before I got my new card I had to have the car serviced.

Of course, what I should have done was to go to my usual station and pay cash. But I wondered if the manager might not be curious and check his list of defaulting cards. I understand that the companies take great pains to keep these lists up to date, and since it had been two days since I'd wired them, it wasn't out of the question to suppose that my number would be there, and that he'd think I was a bad credit risk. A thing like that gets around fast in our village. I shouldn't really have worried about something like that, I know, but it was late and I was tired. And of course the other major oil company station would be even worse. The manager of my station would have seen me right across the road.

At any rate I was going on a trip the next day, and I thought of the old station at the low end of the village. I only wanted a grease

job and an oil change. Hundreds, or at least dozens, of people must patronize the place every day. What could go wrong?

Bosko—I didn't know his name at the time, but I had seen him around the village and knew what he looked like—wasn't there. Only the boy, Bubber, covered with oil from an incredible car he had been working on. I suppose he saw me staring at it because he said, "Ain't you never seen one like that?"

I told him I hadn't, then tried to describe what I wanted done to my American. Bubber wasn't paying attention. "That's a *funny car* there," he said. "They uses 'em for drag races and shows and what not. Rares right up on his back wheels. Wait'll I finish with him and I'll show you."

I said, "I haven't time. I just want to leave my car to be serviced."

That seemed to surprise him, and he looked at my American with interest. "Nice little thing," he said, almost crooning.

"I always see it has the best of care. Could you give me a lift home now? I'll need my car back before eight tomorrow morning."

"I ain't supposed to leave when Bosko ain't here, but I'll see if I can find one that runs."

Cars, some of them among the strangest I had ever seen, were parked on almost every square foot of the station's apron. There

was an American Legion parade car rebuilt to resemble a "forty and eight" boxcar, now rusting and rotting; a hulking candy-apple hot rod that looked usable, but which Bubber dismissed with, "Can't get no rings for her, she's overbored"; stunted little British mini's with rickets; a Crosley, the first I had seen in ten years; a two-headed car with a hood, and I suppose an engine, at each end; and others I could not even put a name to. As we walked past the station for the second time in our search, I saw a sleek, black car inside and caught Bubber (soiling my fingers) by the sleeve. "How about that one? It looks ready to go."

Bubber shook his head positively and spat against the wall. "The Aston Martin? He's too damn mean."

And so I drove home, eventually, in a sagging school bus which had been converted into a sort of camper and had "Wabash Family Gospel Singers" painted in circus lettering on its side. I spent the evening explaining the thing to my wife and went to bed rather seriously worried about whether or not I would have my car back by eight as well as about what Bubber's clothing would do to my upholstery.

I need not have concerned myself as it turned out. I was awakened about three (according to the illuminated dial of my

alarm clock) by the sound of an engine in my driveway, and when I looked out through the Venetian blinds, I saw my faithful little Rambler parked there. I went back to sleep with most of my anxiety gone, listening to those strange little moans a warm motor makes as it cools. It seemed to me they lasted longer than normal that night, mingling with my dreams.

Next morning I found a grimy yellow statement for twenty-five dollars on the front seat. Nothing was itemized; it simply read (when I finally deciphered the writing, which was atrocious) "for service."

As I mentioned above, I was leaving on a trip that morning, and I had no time to contest this absurd demand. I jammed it into the map compartment and contrived to forget it until I returned home a week later. Then I went to the station—Bosko was there, fortunately—and explained that there must have been some mistake. Bosko glanced at my bill and asked me again, although I had just told him, what it was I had ordered done. "I wanted the oil changed and the chassis greased," I repeated, "and the tank filled. You know, the car serviced."

I saw that that had somehow struck a nerve. Bosko froze for a moment, then smiled broadly and with a ceremonious gesture tore the yellow slip to bits which he allowed to sift through his fingers

to the floor. "Bubber made a mistake, I guess, Colonel," he said with what struck me as false bonhomie. "This one's on the house. She behave okay while you had her out?"

I was rattled at being called Colonel (I have found since that Bosko applies that honorific to all his customers) and could only nod. As a matter of fact the American's performance had been quite flawless, the little car seeming, if anything, a bit more eager than usual.

"Well, listen," Bosko said, "you let me know if there's any trouble at all with her. And like I said, this one's on the house. We'd like your business."

My new card came, and I had almost forgotten this incident when my car began giving trouble in the mornings. I would start the engine as usual, and it would run for a few seconds, cough, and stop; and after this prove impossible to start again for ten or fifteen minutes. I took it to the station I usually patronize several times and they tinkered with it dutifully, but the next morning the same thing would occur. After this had been going on for three weeks or so, I remembered Bosko.

He was sympathetic. This, I have to admit, made me warm to him somewhat. The manager of my usual station had been pretty curt the third time I complained about my car's "morning trouble",

as I called it. When I had described the symptoms to Bosko, he asked, "You smell gas when it happens, Colonel?"

"Yes, now that you mention it, I do. There's quite a strong gasoline odor."

He nodded. "You see, Colonel, what happens is that your engine is drawin' in the gas from the carb, then pukin' it back up at you. You know, like it was sick."

So my American had a queasy stomach mornings. It was a remarkable idea, but on the other hand one of the very few things I've ever been told by a mechanic that made sense. Naturally I asked Bosko what we could do about it.

"There's a few things, but really they won't any of them help much. The best thing is just live with it. It'll go away by itself in a while. Only I got something serious to tell you, Colonel. You want to come in my office?"

Mystified, I followed him into the cluttered little room adjoining the garage portion of the station and seated myself in a chair whose bottom was dropping out. To be truthful, I couldn't really imagine what he could have to tell me since he hadn't so much as raised the hood to look at my engine; so I waited with equanimity for him to speak. "Colonel," he said, "you got a bun in the oven—you know what I mean? Your car does, that is. She's *that way*."

I laughed, of course.

"You don't believe me? Well, it's the truth. See, what we got here," he lowered his voice, "is kinda what you would call a stud service. An' when you told Bubber you wanted her *serviced*, you never havin' come here before, that's what he thought you meant. So he, uh," Bosko jerked his head significantly toward the sleek, black Aston Martin in the garage, "he, you know, he *serviced* it. I was hopin' it wouldn't take. Lots of times it don't."

"This is ridiculous. Cars don't breed."

Bosko waggled his head at me. "That's what they'd like you to think in Detroit. But if you'd ever lived around there and talked to any of the union men, those guys would tell you how every year they make more and more cars with less and less guys comin' through the gate."

"That's because of automation," I told him. "Better methods."

"Sure!" He leveled a dirty finger at me. "Better methods is right. An' what's the best method of all, huh? Ain't it the way the farmer does? Sure there's lots of cars put together the old-fashioned way early in the year when they got to get their breedin' stock, but after that—well, I'm here to tell you, Colonel, they don't hire all them engineers up there for nothing. Bionics, they call it. Makin' a machine act like it was a' animal."

"Why doesn't everybody . . ."

He shushed me, finger to lips. "'Cause they don't like it, that's why. There's a hell of a big license needed to do it legal, and even if you're willin' to put up the bread, you don't get one unless you're one of the big boys. That's why I try to keep my little operation here quiet. Besides, they got a way of makin' sure most people *can't*."

"What do you mean?"

"You know anything about horses? You know what a gelding is?"

I admit I was shocked, though that may sound foolish. I said, "You mean they . . . ?"

"Sure." Bosko made a scissors gesture with his arms, snapping them like a pair of giant shears. "Ain't you ever noticed how they make all these cars with real hairy names, but when you get 'em out on the road, they ain't really got anything? Geldings."

"Do you think . . ." I looked (delicately, I hope) toward my American, "it could be repaired? What they call an illegal operation?"

Bosko spread his hands. "What for? Listen, Colonel, it would just cost you a lot of bread, and that little car of yours might never recover. Ain't it come through to you yet that if you just let nature take her course for a while yet, you're goin' to have yourself a new car for nothing?"

I took Bosko's advice. I should not have; it was the first time in

my life I have ever connived at anything against the law; but the idea of having a second car to give my wife attracted me, and I must admit I was fascinated as well. I dare say that in time Bosko must have regretted having persuaded me; I pestered him with questions, and once even, by a little genteel blackmail, forced him to allow me to witness the Aston Martin in action.

For all its sleek good finish it was a remarkably unprepossessing car, with something freakish about it. Bosko told me it had been specially built for use on some British television program now defunct. I suppose the producers had wanted to project the most masculine possible image, and it was for this reason that it had been left reproductively intact—to fall, eventually, into Bosko's hands. When Bubber started the engine it made a sound such as I have never heard from any car in my life, a sort of lustful snarl.

The Aston Martin's bride for the night was a small and rather elderly Volks squareback, belonging I suppose to some poor man who could not afford to buy a new car through legal channels, or perhaps hoped to turn a small profit on his family vehicle's fecundity. I must say I felt rather sorry for her, forced to submit to a beast like the Aston Martin. In action all it's appearance of feline grace proved a fraud; it experienced the

same difficulties a swine breeder might expect with a huge champion boar, and had to be helped by Bosko with ramps and jacks while Bubber fought the controls.

The months of my American's time passed. Her gasoline consumption went up and up until I was getting barely eleven miles to the gallon. She acquired a swollen appearance as well, and became so deficient in endurance she could scarcely be forced up even a moderate hill, and overheated continually. When eight months had passed the plies of her tires separated, forming ugly welts in the sidewalls, but Bosko warned me not to replace them since the same problem would only occur again.

On the night of the delivery Bosko offered to allow me to observe, but I declined. Call it squeamishness, if you will. Late that night—very late—I walked past his station and stared from the sidewalk at the bright glow of a trouble light and the scuttling shadows within, but I felt no urge to let them know I was there. The next morning, before I had breakfast, Bosko was on the phone asking if I wanted to pick my cars up: "I'll drive your old one over if you'll give me a lift back." Then I knew that my American had come through the ordeal, and breathed somewhat more easily.

My first sight of her son was, I admit, something of a shock. It

—I find it hard to call him *he*— is a deep, jungle green inherited from Heaven knows what remote ancestor, and his seats are covered in a long-napped sleazy stuff like imitation rabbit fur. I had expected—I don't know quite why—that he would be of some recognizable make: a Pontiac, or perhaps a Ford, since they are made in both England and America. He is nothing of the sort, of course, and I realize now that those *marques* with which we are familiar must be carefully maintained purebred lines. As it is I have searched him everywhere for some sort of brand name that would allow me to describe the car to prospective purchasers, but beyond a sort of trademark that appears in several places (a shield with a band or stripe running from left to right) there is nothing. Where part numbers or serial numbers appear, they are often garbled or illegible, or do not match.

It was necessary to license him of course, and to do this it was necessary to have a title. Through Bosko I procured one from an unethical used-car dealer for thirty dollars. It describes the car as a '54 Chevrolet; I wish it were.

No dealer I have found will give me any sort of price for it, and so I have advertised it each Sunday for the past eight months in the largest paper in the city

where I work, and also in a small, nationally circulated magazine specializing in collector's cars. There have been only two responses: one from a man who left as soon as he saw the car, the other from a boy of about seventeen who told me he would buy him as soon as he could find someone who would lend him the money. Had I been more alert I would have taken whatever he had, made over the spurious title to him, and trusted him for the rest; but at the time I was still hoping to find a bona fide buyer.

I have had to turn my American over to my wife since she refuses to drive the new car, and the several mechanical failures he has already suffered have been extremely inconvenient. Parts in the conventional sense are nonexistent. Either alterations must be made which will allow the corresponding part from some known make to be used, or the part must be made by a job shop. This, I find, is one of the penalties of our—as I thought—unique automotive miscegenation; but when, a few weeks ago, I grew so discouraged I attempted to abandon the car, I discovered that someone else must have made the same crossing. When the police forced me to come and retrieve it, I found that the radiator, generator, and battery were missing.

Here is a fast-moving, actionful story about a product of an artificial womb: a remotely human individual with a brilliant psionic mind, who witnesses a murder and seems powerless to do anything about it, or even defend himself from the murderers . . .

A THIRD HAND

by Dean R. Koontz

TIMOTHY WAS NOT HUMAN. Not wholly. If one included arms and legs in a definition of the human body, then Timothy did not pass the criteria necessary for admission to the club. If one counted two eyes in that definition, Timothy was also ruled out, for he had but one eye, after all, and even that was placed in an unusual position: somewhat closer to his left ear than a human eye should be and definitely an inch lower in his overlarge skull than was the norm. Then there was his nose. It totally lacked cartilage. The only evidence of its presence was two holes, the ragged nostrils, punctuating the relative center of his bony, misshapen head. There was his skin:

waxy yellow like some artificial fruit and coarse with large, irregular pores that showed like dark pinpricks bottomed with dried blood. There were his ears: very flat against his head and somewhat pointed like the ears of a wolf. There were other things that would show up on a closer, more intimate examination, things like his hair (which was of an altogether different texture than any racial variant among the normal human strains), his nipples (which were ever so slightly concave instead of convex), and his genitals (which were male, but which were contained in a pouch just below his navel and not between his truncated limbs). There was only one way in which

Timothy was remotely human, and that was his brain. But even here, he was not entirely normal, for his IQ was slightly above 250.

He had been a product of the Artificial Wombs, a strictly military project which intended to produce beings usable as weapons of war, beings with psionic abilities that could bring the Chinese to their knees. But when such gnarled results as Timothy rolled from the Wombs, the scientists and generals connected with the project threw up their hands and resigned themselves to more public condemnation.

Timothy was placed in a special home for subhuman productions of the Wombs where he was expected to die within five years. But it was in his third year there that they came to realize that Timothy (he was the "T" birth in the fifth alphabetical series, thus his name) was more than a mindless vegetable. Much more. It happened at feeding time. The nurse had been dutifully spooning pre-digested pabulum into his mouth, cleaning his lips and chin as he dribbled, when one of the other "children" in the ward entered its death throes. She hurried off to assist the doctor who was injecting some sedative into the mutant hulk, leaving Timothy hungry. Due to the training of a new staff nurse that afternoon, he had inadvertently been skipped in the previous feeding. As a result, he

was ravenous. But the nurse did not return in response to his caterwauling. He tossed and pitched on his foam mattress, but legless and armless as he was, there was nothing he could do to reach the bowl of food that rested on the table next to his crib, painfully within sight of his one, misplaced eye. He blinked that eye, squinted it, and lifted the spoon without touching it! He levitated the instrument to his mouth, licked the pabulum from it, and sent it back to the bowl for more. It was during his sixth spoonful that the nurse returned, saw what was happening, and fainted dead away.

The same night, Timothy was moved from the ward.

Quietly.

He did not know where they were taking him. Indeed, having lacked most of the sensory stimulation afforded normal three-year-olds, he did not even care. Without proper stimulation, he had never developed rational, logical thought processes. He understood nothing beyond his own basic desires, the desires of his body: hunger, air, water, excretion. It never occurred to him to wonder where he was going—if he even knew he was going anywhere.

But he wasn't ignorant for long. The military was hungry for another success (they had had only two others) and hurried his development along. They tested

his IQ as best they could and found it was slightly above normal. That was a good sign. There had been fears that they would have to work with a psionically gifted moron. Next, the computers devised an educational program suited to his unique history. The program was initiated.

He was expected to be talking in seven months.

He was talking in five weeks.

He was expected to be able to read in a year and a half.

He was reading on a college level in three months.

Not surprisingly, they found his IQ was rising. An IQ is based on what an individual has learned as well as what he innately knows. When Timothy had first been tested, he had learned absolutely nothing. His slightly above normal score had been garnered solely on what he innately knew. Excitement at the project grew until Timothy had reached an IQ of 250 plus. It was now eighteen months since he had lifted his spoon without hands. He devoured books. But he switched from topic to topic, from two weeks of advanced physics texts to a month of 19th Century British Literature. But the military didn't care. They did not expect him to be a specialist. They only wanted him to be educated and conversant. At the end of eighteen months, they felt he was both these things. So they turned to other plans . . .

They coached his psionic abilities, trying to develop them. There were many dreams in military minds. There were dreams of Timothy destroying the entire Chinese Army with one burst of psionic power. But dreams are only dreams. The sad fact was soon evident that Timothy's psi powers were severely limited. The heaviest thing he could lift was a spoon full of applesauce. And his radius of ability was only one hundred feet. As a superweapon, it was something of a washout.

The reaction among the generals was more than disappointment. After the immediate paralysis wore off, there was a strong desire for revenge. They opted to dissect him to discover what they could of his ability.

Luckily for him, the war ended that week.

The Bio-Chem people had come up with the weapon that had ended it. At last turn, the Artificial Wombs had proved useless. The final weapon was a virus released on the Chinese mainland at roughly the same time the generals were discovering Timothy's limitations. Before they could dissect him, the speedy killer had wiped out approximately one half the Chinese male population—as it was structured to affect only certain chromosome combinations in only the Mongoloid race—and had induced the enemy into a reluctant surrender.

Plans for dissection went astray. The Wombs were put under the administration of the Bio-Chem people, and they dissolved the project. The Bio-Chems were fascinated by Timothy. For three weeks, he was exhaustively tested and retested. He gave so many spoon-lifting demonstrations that he saw floating spoons in his sleep. And he heard their discussions about "what his brain might look like." It was a rugged three weeks.

But in the end they didn't saw him up to satisfy their curiosity. Somewhere along the line, a leak had reached the press, and the story of the horribly crippled mutant who could lift spoons without touching them was a Three Day Sensation. During the excitement of those three days, the largest bureau of the now peace-oriented government, the Veteran's Bureau, stepped in and took control of him. Senator Kilroy announced that the Veteran's Bureau was going to rehabilitate the young man, provide him with grav plate servo-hands and a grav plate system for mobility. He was a Three Day Sensation again. And so was the politically wise senator who took credit for the project . . .

* Timothy (or "Ti" as he went by now, having never assumed a surname after gaining his freedom) stood on the patio that jutted beyond the cliff and watched the birds settling noisily into the

big green pines that spread thickly down the mountainside. Behind him was the house that had been built from the money acquired from his book advances—*Autobiography of a Reject* and *A Case For Artificial Birth*—a proud monument of a structure erected over the ruins of a Revolutionary War pro-British secret supplies cellar. He cherished the house and what it contained, for it was ninety percent of his world. The other ten percent was his business. He was shrewd, and his business paid off. He used the receipts chiefly to maintain the house and to buy his books and the films for his private projection room. He had organized and launched, with his writing monies, the first stat newspaper designed solely for entertainment. No news. Just gossip and gossip and more gossip. It was a ten-page scandal sheet that stated out of the wall printers in eleven million homes promptly at eight in the morning and four thirty in the afternoon. But now his business was not with him in his thoughts, and he focused his attention on the birds that fluttered below. He directed his left servo-hand to pull apart the branches obscuring his view of a particularly fine specimen. The six-fingered prosthesis swept away from him on the grav plates that cored its palm, shot forty feet down the embankment to the offending branch and

gently pulled it aside so as not to disturb the birds.

But the birds were too aware: they flew. Using his limited psi power, Ti reached into the two hundred miniature switches of the control module buried in the globe of the grav plate system that capped his truncated legs. The switches, operated by his psi power, in turn maneuvered his hands and moved him about on his grav plate sphere as he wished. He recalled his left servo-hand now that the bird had gone. It rushed back to him and floated at his left side, directly out from his shoulder, just as the right hand floated on the other side.

He looked at his watch and was surprised to find it was past time for his usual morning chat with Taguster. He flipped the mini-switches, floated around and through the patio doors into the plush living room. He moved across the fur carpet and glided into the special cup-chair of his Mindlink set. He raised a servo-hand and pulled down the glittering helmet, fitting it securely to his bony cranium (it too had been specially crafted), reached out with the other servo and threw the proper toggles to shift his mind into the receiver in Taguster's living room. There was a moment of blurring when intense blacks and grays swarmed formlessly about him. His mind flashed on the Mindlink Company beam past

thousands of other minds going to other receivers, covered the forty miles to the city and Taguster's house. The blacks and grays swirled dizzingly, then cleared and turned into colors. The first thing he saw through the receiver camera was Taguster lying dead against the wall . . .

No. Not dead. There was blood, surely, pooling about the concert guitarist's head, but that same head was also moving, nodding in near unconsciousness, but nodding nonetheless. Ti settled his mind into the comfortable interior of the receiver and operated the voice box. "Lenny!"

It was almost impossible for him to believe the musician was hurt—maybe mortally hurt. A good friend never dies. Never! The shock of the situation echoed back his trace pathway on the Mindlink beam and jolted through his body, trying to make that dumb hulk of flesh understand the horror of the situation.

"Lenny, what happened?"

Taguster raised his head a little, enough for Ti to see the thin dart buried half in his throat. Taguster tried to say something, but he could manage only a thick gurgle, like syrup splattering against the bottom of a galvanized bucket.

Darts? Who would want to kill Leonard Taguster? And why hadn't they finished the job?

The musician was gurgling frantically as if he desperately

needed to communicate something. Ti's mind swam inside the receiver, as if it were trying to break free and dissipate its charge. He was fighting off panic, and he knew it. Taguster wanted to say something. But how could that be accomplished with his pale throat violated? He could not talk. And from the looks of it, the dart had been tipped with something that made it impossible for him to walk, something that had partially paralyzed him. He scrabbled a limp hand against the wall as if writing without implement, and Ti got the idea. He turned the head of the receiver around so that the cameras showed him most of the room. There was a desk with various writing tools lying on it, and it was only twenty feet away, against the far wall. But a receiver was not mobile—and Taguster could not move. Ti thought of retreating from the receiver and returning to his body, calling the police from his house. But from the looks of him, Taguster could not last that much longer, and the man's desire to communicate was too intense to ignore.

Ti had never thought to experiment to see if his psi power traveled with his mind when he entered a receiver, but this was as good a time as any to find out! He squinted eyes that he didn't have (the cameras could not rightfully be called eyes, and his own orb was at home, lying lopsided

in his irregular head) and forced his psi energies to coalesce in the vicinity of the desk. He reached out and toyed with the pencil. It flipped over and almost rolled onto the floor! He doubled his effort, lifted it, and floated it across the room to where Taguster lay dying. He imagined he was sweating.

Taguster picked the instrument up and held it as if he were not exactly sure what to do with it. He coughed up blood and stared at that a moment.

"Lenny," the mutant urged. "Write it. Write . . . it."

Taguster looked blearily up at the receiver screen, seemed to nod. He raised his hand and wrote on the wall: MARGLE. The letters were shaky and uneven, but they were readable.

"What does that mean?"

Taguster seemed to sigh, dropped the pencil.

"Lenny!"

Taguster looked at the screen again, fumbled with the pencil, lifted it and scribbled under the word "Margle": NAME.

So Margle was a name. And now that the connection had been made for him, Ti seemed to have remembered hearing it somewhere, though he could not place the source or context. Well, anyway, the musician had named his would-be killer, and the mutant felt justified in leaving the scene long enough to notify the police. But then, someone screamed.

It was a woman's scream, high and piercing. It started full strength, turned to a gurgle much like Taguster's, and trailed away. It had come from the direction of the bedroom. There was another receiver in there, an extension of the living room box, and Ti vacated his present perch for the bedroom set.

It was a woman. She had been trying to get out of the window, but her flimsy nightdress had caught on the window latch, delaying her just a moment too long. There were three darts in her back, and the yellow negligee was running with red, red blood. Ti looked to the right, hunting the killer. He had assumed the man had left, but he had only disabled Taguster, then had gone quickly on to the woman to kill her before she could escape. The blood had now soaked her negligee and was dripping onto the floor from the frilly lace edging. He shifted the camera to the left, and he saw his killer. And it wasn't a man . . .

It was a Police Hound. Its dark metal body floated toward the doorway, its two servo-hands flying ahead of it, their fingers tensed as if they were ready to latch onto something and strangle it to death. The dart tube on its burnished belly was protruding, prepared for action. This was the killer, thirty-odd pounds of ball-shaped computer that could track a man by smell, sight, touch, and sound.

And only the police should have one!

But why would the police want to kill Leonard Taguster? And why should they use such a round-about method of obtaining his destruction? Why not simply haul him in on some phony charge replete with carefully prepared evidence and do away with him legally?

The Hound disappeared through the doorway into the hall, and Ti suddenly remembered Taguster lying back there in the living room. The Hound was going back to finish the job! The darts were evidently tipped with poison, though Police Hounds should carry only defense-and-capture narcotics. Now that Taguster's lover had been kept from spreading the news, it was time to take care of the guitarist in proper fashion.

Ti retreated from the bedroom connection and shifted his mind back to the main receiver. Taguster was still lying against the wall in the same position, still not unconscious, still gurgling, trying to tell Ti who Margle was. But the Hound was on its way! Ti searched the room frantically, looking for a weapon.

The Hound came through the doorway and drifted toward Taguster.

Ti found a curio, a small brass peasant leading a small brass mule, a hand-crafted trinket Taguster had brought back from his tour of

Mexico. He lifted it with his psi power and threw it at the Hound. The toy bounced off the dully gleaming hide of the machine, fell harmlessly to the floor. The Hound drifted at Taguster, its dart tube thrusting farther out of its underside, its servos spreading to either side to give it a clear line of fire.

Ti found an ashtray, tried lifting it, could not.

Panic threatened to tip him into irrationality. But that, he cautioned himself, would do the musician no good at all. He was the man's only hope! There were only seconds left. Then he remembered the gun on the desk-top. It had been lying at the opposite end from the pencils, heavy and ugly, a deterrent to burglars. He touched the pistol psionically, but he could not nudge it. He pressed harder, eventually moved it slightly until the barrel was pointing toward the Hound. Pulling the light wire of the automatic trigger was easy. The gun spat a narco-needle that bounced off the beast. That was no good!

And then the Hound shot Taguster. Four times in the chest: *thud, thud, thud, thud!* The guitarist gurgled thickly, sighed, and dropped his head, quite dead now. Ti felt as if all the energy he had possessed had been sucked out of him by an electric vampire, yet he could not let the Hound escape. He sent his cameras swiv-

eling about, looking for things small enough to be handled by his limited talents. He found various trinkets and figurines and rained them uselessly upon the killer machine. It surveyed the room, perplexed, firing darts in the direction from which the souvenir hail came, unable to discover its assailant. Then it turned a spatter of darts on the receiver head and floated out of the room—out of the house and away . . .

For a time, Ti remained in the living room receiver, looking at Taguster's corpse. He was too weakened to do anything else. His mind filled with remembrances of their friendship, scene after scene flicking after one another like dried leaves blown by a cold autumn wind. Finally, when there were no more memories, there was nothing to do but return to his own set, to his own house. He broke with Taguster's receiver and allowed his mind to flow back into the Mindlink beam, mixing with the blacks and the grays and the almost subaudible murmuring of the thousands of other Mindlink customers. Colors appeared, and he was abruptly back in his own body. He sat for a moment, regaining lost energy, then used a servo to lift the helmet from his head and shut off the machine.

What now?

Ordinarily, he would not have had to consider that question, for he would have wasted no time in

summoning the police. But it had been a Police Hound that had killed Leonard Taguster! If the legal authorities had conspired to take the musician's life, as unlikely as that seemed, then it was madness to contact them about investigating the crime! No, he had to know more before he took any action. But what did he have to go on? Margle! He had the name. He lifted out of the cup-chair and crossed the living room, moved through a painting-lined corridor, and came into the library. He stopped at the wall where the direct com-screen to *Enterstat*, his newspaper, lay like a cataracted eyeball. He punched a button, the third yellow one in an alternating series of green and yellow. A panel slid away beside the screen, revealing a computer keyboard, the direct line to the *Enterstat* computer. He punched out the letters M-A-R-G-L-E and depressed the bar marked FULL DATA REPORT.

Thirty seconds later, a printed stat sheet popped out of the info receival slot and into the plastic tray, glistening wetly. He waited a moment for it to dry, then reached with a servo and picked it up. He held it up to his eye, read it, blinking. Klaus Margle was connected with the Dark Brethren, the underworld organization that had been encroaching on the territory once sacrosanct to the Mafia, and it was rumored that he

was the number one man, though this information could not be checked for authenticity. He was six feet tall and weighed two hundred and one pounds. His hair was dark, but his eyes were baby blue. He had a three-inch scar along his right jaw line. He was missing a thumb on his right hand. He believed in taking a hand in the common dangerous chores of the mob. He would not send one of his boys to do something he had never done himself. He was a man of action, not a desk-chained gangster executive. He dated Polly London, the rising young starlet. That was why *Enterstat* had his biography. End of information.

Ti dropped the paper back into the receival tray and stared thoughtfully at the computer keyboard. That explained the Police Hound. The underworld could lay hands on anything it wanted by bribing the proper officials. And somewhere it had secured a Hound. Well, he could just go and dial the police now, report the murder, for they were not involved. Or could he? His intuition (a thing he had long ago learned to respect) told him he should know more about Klaus Margle before he put his nonexistent foot into a nasty patch of briars. He punched out the *Enterstat* main phone number on the com-screen and waited while the two-dimension media (almost en-

tirely a business service now that three-dimensional Mindlink had taken over in the private communications area) rang the number. The blank screen suddenly popped into light, and the face of *Enterstat's* editor, George Creol, swam into view, settled, held still, staring out at him with large, melancholy eyes. "Oh, hello, Chief. What is it?"

"I want some information on a story prospect."

"You writing again, Chief? You always did do great articles."

"Uh, well, just something that interested me. I thought it might make a good feature."

"Who is it?"

"Klaus Margle. He may be the top boy of the Dark Brethren. He dates Polly London. Missing a thumb on his right hand, scarred on his face. That's about all I know, and I got that from our computer. Think you could put a researcher on it?"

"Sure thing, Chief. When do you want the stuff? Tomorrow?"

"I want it in an hour."

"But, Chief—"

"It doesn't have to be complex. I don't need a psychological profile or anything like that. Just the basics. Put a dozen researchers on it if you have to, but have it in an hour!"

"Sounds big."

"It is."

"I'll get on it right away. Call you back in an hour."

Creol signed off, and the screen went blank again.

Ti mixed himself a strong whiskey sour and waited.

An hour later, the com-screen bleeped. He flipped it to reception and watched Creol's face fade in. "Got it, Chief," Creol said. "Hey, he's quite a fellow!"

"Stat it."

"Sure thing."

Creol placed the documents under his recorder scope, one sheet at a time, then punched the transmit button. Moments later, the wet copies dropped into the tray in Ti's wall. He didn't rush to pick them up, though his nerves screamed for action. Creol was already too interested. He didn't want to blow any of this until he knew what he was doing. When all the papers had dropped, he thanked the editor and rang off. He sent a servo to retrieve the data and carried it back into the living room. He slid into a cup-chair beneath a reading globe and shut off the grav plates.

When he had finished reading everything the researchers had found on Klaus Margle, he knew, beyond doubt, that the man was head of the Dark Brethren. The list of other gangsters liquidated under his auspices was awesome. By studying the killings tentatively credited to Klaus Margle, Ti could see the story of an industrious criminal assassinating his way up the ranks and right into

the top roost. The information told him one other thing: he had been wise not to contact the police. Klaus Margle had been arrested nine different times. And he had beaten every rap. Whether he had clever lawyers or whether he spread money around where it would do him the most good was of little consequence. What counted was that if the police investigated this, Margle would eventually go free as he had before. Then he would come hunting for a reject named Timothy. No, this was not something he could turn over to the police. Not until he had conclusive evidence against Margle, evidence the crook could not buy his way out of. He was going to have to handle this thing himself . . .

Ti slid into his Mindlink cup-chair, cut his grav plates, and breathed deeply. As he lowered the helmet and fitted it, his mind raced through the alleyway of the situation. Why should Klaus Margle want to kill a concert guitarist? And how had Taguster come to know the gangster in the first place? It was not his usual type of acquaintance. They were questions that would need answering if he wanted to sew up this case before reporting it to the authorities. But Taguster was dead, and Margle would certainly not talk, so where did that leave Ti? Nowhere. He flipped the toggles,

leaped into the beam, and settled into the receiver in Taguster's living room. The body was still there, of course, twisted grotesquely in its death agonies.

Ti swung the cameras from left to right and found the closet door he wanted. He hoped the thing was where Taguster usually kept it. He palmed open the closet door with his power. Multicolored warning lights flashed amber and crimson and green. He shut off the alarm and looked at the simulacrum. It was a perfect likeness of the musician—except that it wasn't now full of poisoned pins.

Taguster had had the simulacrum made to help him avoid the adulation of his fans. When he was on tour, it was always the android that entered the hotels through the front door, while Taguster sneaked in a service entrance. The simulacrum could walk, talk, think, do almost everything Taguster could do. Its complex brain was cored with his memory tapes and his psychological reaction patterns, so that it could pass for him even in the company of casual friends, though someone as close to him as Ti could not really be fooled.

Ti reached psionically under the flowered sports coat the machine wore, brought it to active status, its eyes opened, cloudy at first, then clearing until its gaze was penetrating. "You," Ti said. "Sim, come here."

It walked out of the closet and stopped before the receiver. For a moment, Ti had the eerie sensation that Taguster had returned from the dead. It was suddenly distasteful to be ordering this image of his friend about like a peasant before a monarch—but it was also essential to the half-conceived plan still taking shape in his mind.

"Sim," he said again.

It raised its eyes and stared directly at the cameras.

"Sim, there is a young woman at the window in the bedroom. She is—dead. I want you to bring her into the utility room. Be careful and don't spill her blood on the carpet. Go."

"Right," the Sim said, turning toward the bedroom. A moment later, he returned, the body cradled in his arms. The blood had ceased to flow and was drying on her lacy garment. The simulacrum stalked across the living room and out of sight.

Ti shifted into the kitchen receiver, watched the android march through and into the utility area. He could only see part of that room through the door, for there was no receiver in it. "Empty the freezer," he directed the android. It complied, piling the hams and roasts and vegetables on the floor.

"Now put her body in it."

It did this thing too.

He ordered it to retrieve Taguster's corpse and do the same

with it. If it took a day or so for this plan to be worked out and put into operation, if it required a couple of days to trap Margle, he wanted to be certain the bodies were well preserved for a future autopsy. This was gruesome, but it was the only thing he could do. When both bodies were in the freezer and the food that had been there was dumped into the incinerator chute, he sent the android about cleaning up all traces of the murder, scrubbing the blood from the floor and carpet, washing the wall down where the musician had scribbled upon it. When the machine-man had finished, the house looked perfectly normal, completely serene.

"Sit down and wait for me," he directed it.

It complied.

He dropped into the Mindlink beam and returned home. He went into the library, sat down at his typer, and used his nimble servos to compose a new headline story for the four-thirty edition. Polly London would surely read *Enterstat* to see if she were mentioned, and it was quite possible that she would pass along the story to Klaus Margle. If Margle didn't subscribe to *Enterstat* himself . . . When he had finished the eight hundred words to the piece, he rang Creol. The man's melancholy eyes resolved first, then the rest of his face. "Chief. Wasn't the info complete enough?"

"Fine, George, fine. Look, I have another story that goes in the four-thirty edition. I want you to tear out the lead story, no matter what it is, and put this one in with two-inch caps."

"But—"

"I know you have the paper ready, but this is what I want."

"Stat it, Chief."

He did. Seconds later, he saw it drop into Creol's desk tray. The editor picked it up, read over it. "What's the headline?" he asked, picking up a pencil.

"Ah—CONCERT GUITARIST VICTIM OF WOULD-BE KILLER."

"But he wasn't killed?"

"Right."

"Then this doesn't make such a sensational headline, Chief. The one we have is—"

"I know. But I want this as the lead anyhow."

"It means resetting page one—"

"Do it."

"You're the boss."

"Right you are."

He rang off. His heart was beating unreasonably fast. He could feel his pulse throbbing in his neck. He moved back to the Mindlink set and shifted into Taguster's house again. The simulacrum waited, hands folded on its lap. He thought a moment, then gave it orders. "I want you to phone Harvard Detective Agency, Incorporated, and contract an investigator—one of their best. Tell him an

attempt was made on your life and you want to find who it was. Tell him you want to see him tomorrow after you have compiled what information you can on your own. Tell him—four o'clock tomorrow."

The android stood, found the number of the agency and dialed it on the com-screen system. He made the transaction, even bargaining over the going rate per diem for a Class I agent, hung up, and returned to his chair. "It's all fixed," he said in the very tones Leonard Taguster would have used. "Anything else?"

"Not yet. You might as well go inactive." He sent his psi power under the sportscoat again, flipped off the android. It seemed to sag in its chair. Its eyes clouded again, then slipped shut as if it were sleeping.

Ti settled in the Mindlink receiver to wait. At four thirty, *Enterstat* would report that an unsuccessful attempt had been made on Taguster's life. It would also report that he had hired Harvard Detective Agency to investigate the attempt for him. If Margle read or heard of the article, he would call Harvard—perhaps offering to pay for Taguster's use of the firm, saying he was a close and concerned friend. The firm would agree, for they really would believe they were representing the musician. And Margle would think his man was still alive. What he would do then was a toss up. It was unlikely,

however, that he would send the Hound to try again at a job it had bungled. Margle was too thorough a man for that. And given his propensity for personal involvement, he might just show up himself. That's what Ti was counting on. But there was nothing to do but wait . . .

He had everything ready. The movie camera was positioned back in his own house, right next to the Mindlink set, ready to be jacked in and record on film whatever transpired in the house of Leonard Taguster. If only Margle would show . . .

At six ten, the com-screen burred.

Quickly, he activated the android. Its eyes blinked, unclouded, and it stood erect, striding off to the com-screen just as naturally as if it had been awakened from a sound nap. It punched to receive the call, and the screen lighted, although no image appeared on it. The android, though, was transmitting, and Klaus Margle—for who else would not want his face seen on the com-screen?—was getting a full-face view of the man he had ordered destroyed. "Who is this?" the android asked.

There was no reply.

"Who is this?"

The com-screen went dead. The other party had rung off without saying a single word.

The android returned to his

chair and looked at the Mindlink receiver. "Did I act correctly under the circumstances?"

"Yes. Yes, you did."

"Then perhaps you could tell me just what those circumstances are. I should know more about the situation."

Ti filled the machine-man in on the death of its owner and all that Ti had learned about the prospective killer. When he had finished talking, he was worn out, and he fancied the receiver talk-box was smoking. They sat, waiting. Darkness came, and they turned on the low lights that flushed the room with a soft orange-red glow. At ten o'clock, Ti realized that he had not eaten anything all day—and that he was thirsty as well. But he dared not leave the receiver lest his suspect arrive while he was gone. At a quarter after eleven, then, they heard the first noise of an intruder . . .

There was a splintering of wood and a sharp thudding, the sound a door or window sill might make as it was wrenched out of its frame. The simulacrum came to its feet and stood looking about the room. "The kitchen," he said.

Ti shifted into the kitchen. The door was indeed bowed out of its frame, shivering as something struck it heavily again. A shoulder? Klaus Margle's shoulder, battering a way into the house? The door gave, the latch ripped loose,

and the portal swung inward. Beyond floated the Hound. But that didn't fit Margle at all! If they thought the Hound had failed—Then he understood. If the Hound had failed, Margle would send it again to try to determine why. There would be men waiting outside in the event the Hound was again unsuccessful. And the confrontation between Hound and android was near. The simulacrum came into the kitchen. The Hound detected him, lurched, whined almost like a real dog. It surged through into the gloomy kitchen and fired half a dozen darts. The pins stuck in the pseudo-flesh of the android, but the poison could do nothing to his unhuman system of wires and tubes—and he did not even bleed. The Hound swung to the left, shot six more darts up the simulacrum's side. Again, the weapon failed to kill.

The android advanced on the Hound.

The Hound ordered its servos ahead and latched one of them around the android's neck, thinking to strangle it. The other servo came up and battered at the artificial face. The machine-man's nose bent into an odd angle, but it didn't break. The android reached up and grabbed the servos, ripped them off himself. He turned, rammed the ends of the metal hands against the wall, snapping some of the fingers. Again. And again, until they were all broken.

The hands floated where he left them, grav plates still operational, but unable to heed the commands of their master, the Hound.

"Capture it and destroy it," Ti ordered.

The simulacrum moved forward and grabbed the ball. It strained to move away from him, but could not. It shot darts into his chest, uselessly. He dragged it across the room, thrust it against the wall. It struck with a sharp crack, struggled, but was no match for the superhuman electronic and metal muscles of the simulacrum. He smashed it again and again, just as he had the hands, until the housing on the grav plates buckled and the plates loosened. He ripped the housing off, pulled the plates out of their connections and tossed them across the room where they floated above the sink.

"Now toss it back outside," Ti ordered.

The android did so, walking onto the platform of the rear patio and heaving the beast over the edge to fall on the driveway below. It struck with a resounding crash and shattered into a dozen or more large pieces. The android came back inside and crossed to the receiver. It was time for more waiting . . .

Minutes passed. A half an hour. Ti began to worry that they had been too drastic with the Hound and had scared off their killer. But just when he was ready to speak

to the machine-man, he heard the squeak of shoes on the patio stairs leading from the rear lawn. "They're coming," he whispered fiercely.

The simulacrum nodded.

He dropped into Mindlink beam and returned home, set a servo hand to connect the camera to the impulses registering on this connection, and began filming the kitchen. When he returned, the gangsters had not yet arrived.

They came two seconds later, preceded by tear gas grenades. The kitchen filled with thick, acrid, blue-green fumes that roiled farther into the house, blanketing every room. Moments later, three dark figures came through the doorway wearing breathers and waving pin guns around like small boys with toys. Ti focused the camera on them, was elated when he discovered Margle's face—blue eyes, black hair, and a scarred cheek. He got a good, clear shot of him. Then he filmed the two accomplices, determined to convict them all. He did not take the camera off their faces. The intruders were oblivious to him, however. They spotted the android and decided it was Taguster in a breather of his own and that they had better fire while they still had a chance. Their dart guns burst with staccato tapping that echoed about the gas-filled kitchen.

The darts sank in but had no effect. The simulacrum advanced on

the trio. One of them found the light switch, palmed it. In the ensuing brilliance, they saw all the darts puncturing the pseudo-flesh and knew the simulacrum for what it was. They holstered their weapons and moved in on it. It started backing away from them, but they cornered it, pinned the machine's arms, and reached under its flowered coat, deactivating it. It blinked its eyes, clouded them, closed them, and slumped against the wall, sliding to the floor like a drunk finally reaching his limit.

"Spread out and search the place," Margle ordered.

The two men moved through the rest of the house. Margle checked the utility room (though not the freezer) and the kitchen closet. A minute or two after he had finished, the others returned. "Nothing anywhere," one of them said, shaking his head. Then he seemed to become aware of the soft light of the Mindlink receiver cameras. "Boss!"

They came at the receiver like madmen, leering, enraged, snorting, faces flushed and lips twisted. One of the men raised a gun butt to smash in the lens, but Margle grabbed his arm. "No!"

"But, Boss—"

"You!" Margle snapped, directing his leer straight into the camera. "We're going to find you. We're going to trace you from the call records." He grinned, pressed his fingertips against the lens.

Then he drew his pistol, moved his fingers, swung the butt, and smashed in the glass . . .

He settled into the Mindlink receiver in his own house, shaken, raised the helmet, and flipped off the machine. Margle had broken the lens—but not soon enough. The camera had been grinding away the entire time. It was only now, after the confrontation had come and passed, that he realized how tense he was. He tried to relax, recalling some relaxing yoga contemplation patterns that he had picked up somewhere. It worked a little. Yes, Margle could trace the call if he brought in a Mindlink expert, and there was no doubt the mob could have access to such a person, for the mob had access to everything. But even with an expert, that would take several hours. And Margle just didn't have that much time left.

Ti disconnected the movie camera from the set and took it into the library, to the film corner. He slipped the loaded spool into the automatic processor, waited eight minutes, removed it completely developed. He stretched out a length of the film and held it between himself and the ceiling light. There was the face of Klaus Margle, as ugly as in real life, scar and all. Ti had won.

He moved to the com-screen and punched the number One. A moment later, the screen brightened,

and a desk sergeant's face popped into view. "Police," he said, a pencil in his hands, ready to record any pertinent information, even though the call—like all calls to the police—was being recorded.

"I would like to report a murder," he said, then abruptly wished he had been more circumspect.

The desk officer's face slipped away and was replaced by another hung above shoulders that were covered in plain brown business suit. "Homicide, here," the new face said. "Go on."

"I—have a murder to report."

"Go on."

"I—"

"Well?"

"I want to report it in person. I have evidence."

"The com-screen is fine. We handle all our homicides over the com—"

"In person," Ti persisted. He knew the sort of run-around he could get by phone. His own editor, Creol, gave the run-around to almost everyone who called *Enterstat* to speak to Ti.

"Look, Mr.— You haven't reported your name. The informer's name should always be the first statement. What's your name?"

"Timothy of *Enterstat*."

The detectives eyebrows went up. "And you won't report over the com-screen?"

"No."

"We'll send a man around. Your address is in central files?"

"Yes."

"Be there in fifteen minutes."

When the police dealt with the wealthy, the treatment was somewhat different than when they dealt with the comfortable or the poor. Ti knew it, did not like it, but was nevertheless glad of it now. If he wanted to be sure this case got solved, he was convinced that he must launch it himself. And since it was easier for them to come to him, he had had to make them do just that.

Fifteen minutes later, almost to the second, the doorbell rang. He sent a servo to turn the latch knob and pull the portal wide. A thin man with a pencil mustache stepped through into the living-room. The servo closed the door behind him. He looked at Ti a moment, tried to conceal his shock—shock though he was certain to know the mutant's nature—and took off his fur hat. "Detective Modigliani," he said in tight, compressed words, each syllable like the quick crack of a rifle shot.

"Glad to meet you, Detective. Come in. Sit down."

The thin man crossed the room and took a seat while Ti drifted into one of his own special cup-chairs and shut down his grav plates. "This is most unusual," Modigliani said.

"It's an unusual case."

"Perhaps you could explain it?"

Ti hesitated only a moment, then launched into his story.

When he had finished, the detective sat with his hands folded in his lap and twisted his mouth as if trying to get at his mustache and nibble on it. "Quite extraordinary. And you say you have film?"

"Yes."

The detective scowled. "You have invaded privacy, you know."

"What?"

Modigliani stood and paced to the wall, turned dramatically. "Privacy, sir. It's an invasion of privacy to photograph someone through the Mindlink impressions."

"But I was corraling evidence!"

"That's the job of the police, don't you think?"

"I happen to know," Ti said, flipping on his systems and rising from his chair, "that Klaus Margle was arrested nine times and yet never served a prison sentence."

"What are you suggesting?"

He almost spat out the accusations that were most assuredly true, but he held his tongue just long enough to calm himself. "Nothing. Nothing. But—well, have a look at the films, why don't you?"

"Yes. I would like to see those."

Ti led the way into the library where he set up the projector and pulled down the wall screen. "Hit the lights, will you?"

Modigliani hit the lights. There was darkness.

The projector hummed, and suddenly the screen was filled with

images. Roiling smoke clouds, to begin with. Then, coming through these were three men with breathers clamped in their teeth, with plugs in their nostrils. The picture zoomed in on the lead man, and there was Klaus Margle, larger than life!

But just his face. As the picture progressed, Ti discovered his error: he had been so anxious to get good shots of Margle's face that he had missed most of the other action. He had trained the cameras on the heads of the invaders, missing nearly everything else that they did. There was no sound, either. The threatening face of Klaus Margle leaning into the camera at the end lacked force when his words were nonexistent.

The film stuttered, slipped, and was gone.

"It's not much," Modigliani said.

Ti started to protest.

The detective interrupted. "It's not really much. Faces. You could have filmed Klaus Margle almost anywhere."

"But the tear gas—"

"And I didn't see him killing anyone. It still looks to me like we should chiefly be concerned with an invasion-of-privacy charge against you, sir, not with some charge against Mr. Margle."

Ti must have seen the futility of argument, but he wouldn't allow himself to give in that easily. He argued, pleaded, lost his tem-

per and called names. All names, of course, being sucked up by the detective's personal recorder for future use. In the end, he could only suggest calling Taguster's home. Either the receivers would all be broken, or they would meet Klaus Margle and his henchmen.

"Or," Modigliani pointed out, "there may be no answer, which isn't enough to warrant an investigation either."

But there was an answer. Taguster's face popped onto the com-screen, smiling. "Yes?"

Modigliani turned and gave Ti an I-told-you-so look.

"The android," Ti hissed.

Modigliani identified himself to Taguster's simulacrum. "We've had a report," he said, "that you've been murdered."

Taguster laughed. It was very hard to believe he was an android. "As you can see—" he didn't bother to finish.

"Would you mind," Modigliani asked, "if I moved into Mindlink and inspected your rooms at close range?"

"Go ahead," Taguster's android said confidently.

"Thank you," Modigliani flipped off the com-screen and returned to the living room and the Mindlink set there. He popped into Mindlink beam and entered the living room receiver at Taguster's. He flipped to the bedrooms, gamerooms, library, theater, and finally the kitchen. He thanked

Taguster for the permission to investigate and expressed his apologies at the intrusion. He returned to Ti's set and removed the helmet that didn't quite properly fit his head. "Nothing," he said.

"The kitchen receiver—"

"Was in fine working order. I don't know what you were trying to prove, sir, but—"

"They could have used a mob expert to restore the receiver."

"And Taguster?"

"That was his android!"

"Androids, you must know, don't generally do anything that is detrimental to their owners. If the real Leonard Taguster were murdered, his android would not willingly assist the murderers."

"They could have tinkered with him."

"That takes a *real* expert."

"You know as well as I that Klaus Margle can afford such experts and keeps them on hand!"

Modigliani's seeming stupidity was beginning to annoy Timothy to the point where he wasn't able to suppress his rage. His twisted face flushed, and he could not make his servos stay still. They flitted back and forth like frightened animals looking for a place to hide. But then Modigliani gave away the name of his game: "Sir," he said, "I must caution you to refrain from slander. Mr. Klaus Margle, the Klaus Margle to which you refer, is nothing more than the owner of a large number of restaurants and

garages. He is a respectable businessman, and he should not be open to such slanderous comment —"

"Detective Modigliani," Ti said, his voice level but threatening to escalate into hilarity, "you know damned well—"

"This is being recorded. I must inform you of that." He parted the halves of his round-necked coat to reveal the chest-strapped mini-recorder.

Ti stopped. It was obvious now why he had had such a hard time with Modigliani. The man was bought. When he had learned the accused was Klaus Margle, he had seen where his duty lay—and it wasn't with the Truth. He wasn't interested in investigating the crime. He was only concerned with making a case against Ti as an unreliable witness. He was doing a good job. And Ti realized his own rage would be interpreted as inane prattling if he didn't manage to control himself. "Perhaps you had better go," he said, clamping imaginary hands on his boiling fury.

"The film," Modigliani said, returning to the library.

Ti floated quickly after him, but was too late. When he came through the library doors, the detective had removed the film from the projector and was returning. "You can't have that!" Ti snapped.

"On the contrary. We'll have to study it to see if it was faked. I

don't know what you have against Mr. Margle that would lead you to the construction of such a plan to discredit him, but if falsification of film intended as evidence has taken place, we will be in contact with you."

And he was gone. Ti stood at the window watching him go, knowing full well that the film would be destroyed between here and the police headquarters and that Detective Modigliani would get a bonus from the Dark Brethren this month.

He returned to Mindlink and called Taguster's house. The android was there, reading a book, apparently. It spoke to him as if he didn't know it was the android, asked him how he had been getting along. He didn't bother to answer. He went from room to room, but he could find nothing. He slipped out of the Taguster house and into his own set, removing the helmet.

It was two o'clock in the morning. And Margle was on his way . . .

There were preparations to be made. The police were not going to be any good. There was no hope that they would help. He knew, without need of further corroboration, that any further calls he made to the police would be automatically routed to Modigliani, who would see that he was given the brush-off. So he had to defend himself. He had a collection of pin

and dart weapons with which he amused himself in the basement shooting range. He collected three of these and brought them upstairs. He carried books into the kitchen and braced one of the weapons between them so that it covered the door at waist height. *That* he could trigger with his psionic talents if necessary. He took the other two and grasped one firmly in each servo. There was nothing more but waiting. . .

He heard them in the courtyard behind the house. They were not attempting to be quiet. Their aide Modigliani had probably assured them that the police would stay out of it and that Ti was helpless. He stood at the doorway between kitchen and dining area, both gun-laden servos aimed at the door, his psi ready to trigger the book-propped weapon too. The door rattled. Then something struck it hard. It crashed inward, the lock ripped loose, and a Hound floated into the room.

But the Hound was smashed, broken back at Taguster's!

Which meant they had more than one Hound. With contacts like Modigliani, that was not surprising.

But his guns were no good! The pins would bounce harmlessly off the Hound's "hide", and the beast would sweep in for a swift and sure kill. Ti turned into the dining area, dropping the guns and calling his servos after him. He had ex-

pected men, not machines. Now what? He heard the Hound in the kitchen, but it didn't remain there for long. When he reached the living room, it was humming into the dining area, following him.

He felt panic welling in him as he remembered the pin-punctured throat of the musician, the bloody body of his lover as she had tried to crawl out of the window to avoid the alloy demon. The same alloy demon that now stalked him. But he fought the panic, knowing only death lay with it.

The Hound entered the living room and sensed his presence, swept him with its tiny cameras and radar grids, ascertaining if he were the quarry . . .

His mind raced to find an escape. The house, the great house that was almost a womb for him was highly equipped to contain him in complete luxury, but it wasn't equipped to afford him escape from death. The house would be surrounded by Margle and his men; therefore, the doors were useless. Then he remembered the cellars upon which the house had been built, the dozen rooms that had served as a Revolutionary War Tory supplies depot. If he could get into those, there were any number of outlets onto other places on the mountain.

The Hound fired a series of three pins.

Ti slammed down on his speed controls imbedded in the floating

ball and streaked into the hallway, found the cellar door, and swept down the stairs without even touching them, stairs there for the convenience of guests. He crossed the Tri-D room with its three wall-sized white screens and moved into the shooting range, slamming the door behind. It was a heavy door, an antique resurrected from the Tory cellars before the house had been constructed over them. It would take the Hound a few moments to break it down.

He floated along the left wall where he knew the cellars lay. They stretched back into the mountain, a rough series of fortified caves, after you passed through the first four or five of them. From those caves, there were a number of exits on the mountainside. He reached the end of the room and used his servos to rip loose the half-round that filled in the corner of the plasti-wood paneling. Then, gripping metal fingers around the paneling, he carefully pried the last section away from the wall beams and was looking through into cool darkness: the Tory cellars.

Behind, the Hound struck the door, hard.

Ti could not crouch to squeeze through the cross-beams, but he shifted the grav plates so that he was turned onto his side, then moved ball first through the gap and into the cellar. Once inside, he shifted the grav plates back to normal position and righted him-

self. He sent his servos back to pull the wood paneling back into place from the inside. It might confuse the demon machine for a few minutes, but it could not be a completely successful ruse. It would be after him, no question there.

Through the partition, he heard the door to the shooting range give, crash inward to admit the Hound.

He drifted off slowly through the old cellar, letting his eye adjust to the intense dark. After a few minutes, he could distinguish the vague outlines of fallen beams and broken tables, rotted, shattered chairs, and a few stretches of shelving that had once held ammunition but were now bowed and warped away from the walls, covered with ugly lumps of fungus. He moved from the first cellar into the second.

The panel he had removed was wrenched away from the wall in the first cellar, and light from the shooting range flooded in to dispel the gloom. The Hound came quickly after.

He turned toward the third cellar and moved as fast as he could. He slammed his stump shoulder into a half fallen beam but kept on moving.

The Hound came faster.

When he got to the entranceway of the fifth cellar, he found that there had been a cave-in, and the beams and rock of the ceiling had collapsed to effectively bar his escape. If he had a half an hour,

maybe an hour, he could move enough of the rubble to get through. But the Hound was literally breathing down his neck—though the breath was the warmth of laboring machinery.

He turned on his pursuer. It was coming in from the third cellar, moving around a pile of ruin there. It fired three pins. *Fita-fita-fita . . .*

He moved aside when he saw its intent. The darts studded the rubble wall behind him. He sent his servo-hands to a beam lying in the Hound's pathway, had them worry its tenuous connections with the ceiling. Just as the Hound passed beneath, the beam snapped loose and crashed onto the ball of the hunter. But it only deflected the demon machine's advance. The Hound swerved, bobbled, but recovered and swept closer, firing three pins.

All three missed.

Ti was surprised, for he had not had time to take evasive action, and Hounds were not known to be sloppy marksmen.

The Hound fired three more.

All three missed.

And Ti realized why. He was turning them aside with his psi power! The second time, he had been more conscious of it. He stood, back to the closed door to chamber five, and waited for the Hound to fire again. It did. And, again, the darts shot to either side, deflected suddenly from their target. Over the next several minutes,

he deflected another two dozen of the slender spines, until the Hound was convinced that it's nasty little weapons system was of no use in the situation. It stopped, bobbling gently a dozen feet away, and regarded him with all its measuring devices. A moment later, it sent its two servos towards his neck . . .

He reacted quickly, or he might have been strangled. He called his own servos to him. Four feet from his face, the enemy hands and his own met and locked, metal fingers laced metal fingers. He flushed full power into the hands and set them the task of breaking the Hound's fingers.

But the Hound seemed to have similar ideas. Its own servos wrenched at Ti's so that the four members swayed back and forth in the air, now gaining an inch or two for their master, now losing the same amount of distance. Finally, with both sets at full power and firmly clenched, they did not move at all but merely strained in frozen tableau against one another. When the grav plates and their connections erupted in sparks and smoke, they did so on all four hands. The servos dropped to the floor as if they were a single creature, a metal bird with shot pellets in its wings. Now both hunter and hunted were helpless.

Hunter and hunted. Ti suddenly realized the nomenclature was no longer adequate. Both deprived of hands and Ti able to stop the

Hound's pins, neither was the hunter. He moved by the Hound toward the shooting range. He had discovered another application of his power this night. He mused that necessity always brought out his abilities. It had been necessary to feed himself that day long ago, and he had lifted the spoon. And now it had been a necessity to control the pins. Now he knew he could influence small objects even in high-velocity transit, just as he could lift the spoon.

He moved into the shooting range. The Hound had ceased to follow but bumped purposelessly against the cross-beams as if its mind had been in its hands and as if a loss of ability had led to a loss of purpose. Ti floated up the stairs and into the hallway of the house again. He could hear footsteps in the kitchen: Margle and his men coming to see what had taken the robot so long. Well, he was ready for them. Or he thought he was. He concentrated on his psi until his mind was alive with the power of it. He drifted into the living room just as the Dark Brethren moved in with guns drawn.

"Your Hound is finished," he said, drawing their attention.

The man on Margle's left swung and fired. Ti deflected the pins, all but one. That one he redirected to the man who had shot. The pin sunk in his chest, its poison shooting through him. He gagged, doubled over, and dropped.

"Turn yourself in, Margle," Ti said wearily. "I won't kill you if you'll turn yourself in."

But Margle and the remaining man were crouched behind the sofa. They were not ready to give up just because their target had gotten in a lucky shot. In the dark it had appeared to be a lucky shot and nothing more. They couldn't see that his hands were gone.

"You're crazy," Margle said. "You were crazy for getting into this in the first place."

"Why did you kill Taguster?"

"Why should I tell you?"

Apparently, they could not see him in the dark. Only the dead man had spotted him, and now the others were waiting to zero in on his voice, or waiting for him to move and give himself away.

"You're going to kill me, aren't you—or I will kill you. Either way, telling me won't make a difference, will it?"

"He was on PBT."

"Drugs?"

"We supplied."

"What excuse is that to kill him?"

Margle chuckled as if he were going lax and unwatchful. But Ti knew, if he moved, Margle would fire a murderous barrage—all of which would miss, of course. "It was getting too expensive for him. So he decided to gather information on us. He hoped to turn the information over to the government in return for licensing as a

legal addict. Then he could get his drugs free. But he got too nosy, and our boy became suspicious. We ransacked his house when he was out, and we found his file on us. Almost complete enough to turn over to the proper Federal authorities."

"That shouldn't have bothered you. You bribe authorities."

"Local, not Federal. Did you ever try to bribe a U.N. delegate officer? The kind they have with the narcotic bureau? Can't be done."

"So you killed him."

"So I did. Or, rather, a Hound killed him. You were pretty clever about that, by the way. Had us worried for a while. But calling the local constabulary—now that was a stroke of pure idiocy. It made finding you a great deal easier."

He knew enough now. He knew why Taguster, the man with the gentle, lightning fingers that teased the strings of an ancient instrument, had died. It was the last piece to the puzzle that had begun in the morning and ended, now, not even twenty-four hours later.

"Why didn't the Hound get you?" Margle asked, anxious to satisfy his own curiosity now.

"I had more hands than it," he answered. "I had an extra hand."

"Huh?"

It was time. He moved toward the couch.

They saw him and fired.

He deflected all the pins.

Then he was behind the couch, almost on top of them. They leaped erect, both firing. He deflected all pins save two which he turned back on them. Margle took his in the right cheek. The other man was struck in the neck. Both gagged as the first Brethren had, clutched their chests as their hearts abruptly ceased action, and folded up in neat piles on the carpet.

He turned from them, not wanting to look at the corpses he had made. He floated through the dark room into the library. There he found a pencil and spent some time lifting it and carrying it to the com-screen with his psi power. He punched out the number of Creol's home.

A few minutes passed before the screen lighted and showed Creol's sleep-drawn features. "Chief!"

"I have a story, George."

Creol consulted his watch. "At three-thirty in the morning?"

"Yeah. I want you to get a crew over here, photographer and three reporters who will work different slants on it."

"Your place?"

"My place."

"Now."

"Yes."

"What's the story, Chief."

"You can headline it: EN-TERSTAT CHIEF VICTIM OF WOULD-BE KILLER."

"Don't you think you ought to call the police first?"

"They can wait, George, boy. I guess I ought to get a story out of this, anyway." He hung up and returned to the Mindlink set. He went to Taguster's home and turned off the android. It was reading a book when he deactivated it. Leonard Taguster was dead.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of October 23, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code.) 1. Date of filing, Sept. 30, 1969. 2. Title of publication, The Magazine of FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION, 3. Frequency of issue, monthly. 4. Location of known office of publication, 10 Ferry St., Concord, N.H. 5. Location of the headquarters or general business offices of the publishers (not printers), 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022. 6. Names and addresses of publishers, editor, and managing editor: Publisher: Joseph W. Ferman 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022, Editor: Edward L. Ferman 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022. 7. Owner: Mercury Press, Inc. 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022, Joseph W. Ferman 347 East 53 St. New York, N. Y. 10022. Edward L. Ferman 347 East 53 St., New York, N. Y. 10022. 8. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages or other securities: none. 9. Total no. copies printed (net press run): average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months: 104,619; single issue nearest to filing date: 102,576. B. Paid circulation. 1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales; average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 31,159. Single issue nearest to filing date 34,718. 2. Mail subscriptions: average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 19,140. Single issue nearest to filing date 19,669. C. Total paid circulation. Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 50,299. Single issue nearest to filing date 54,387. D. Free distribution. Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 275. Single issue nearest to filing date 275. E. Total distribution. (Sum of C and D) Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 50,574. Single issue nearest to filing date 54,662. F. Office use, left-over, unaccounted, spoiled after printing. Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 54,045. Single issue nearest to filing date 47,914. G. Total (sum of E and F) Average no. copies each issue during preceding 12 months 104,619. Single issue nearest to filing date 102,576. I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. Edward L. Ferman

Here is a good fantasy with an unusual background. It was originally published in Overdrive, a national magazine that circulates among truck drivers. Its author was once an over the road trucker. He now teaches (English) at the University of Washington. His stories have appeared in Atlantic Monthly and in BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES, 1966 and 1969.

RIDE THE THUNDER

by Jack Cady

A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO CLAIM not to believe in ghosts will not drive 150 above Mount Vernon. They are wrong. There is nothing there. Nothing with eyes gleaming from the roadside, or flickering as it smoothly glides not quite discernible along the fence rows. I know. I pull it now, although the Lexington route is better with the new sections of interstate complete. I do it because it makes me feel good to know that the going-to-hell old road that carried so many billion tons of trucking is once more clean. The macabre presence that surrounded the road is gone, perhaps fleeing back into

smoky valleys in some lost part of the Blue Ridge where haunted fires are said to gleam in great tribal circles and the forest is so thick that no man can make his way through.

Whatever, the road is clean. It can fall into respectable decay under the wheels of farmers bumbling along at 35 in their 53 Chevies.

Or have you driven Kentucky? Have you driven that land that was known as a dark and bloody ground. Because, otherwise you will not know about the mystery that sometimes surrounds those hills, where a mist edges the dis-

tant mountain ridges like a memory.

And, you will not know about Joe Indian who used to ride those hills like a curse, booming down out of Indiana or Southern Illinois and bound to Knoxville in an old B-61 that was probably only running because it was a Mack. You would see the rig first on 150 around Vincennes in Indiana. Or, below Louisville on 64, crying its stuttering wail into the wind and lightning of a river valley storm as it ran under the darkness of electricity-charged air. A picture of desolation riding a road between battered fields, the exhaust shooting coal into the fluttering white load that looked like windswept rags. Joe hauled turkeys. Always turkeys and always white ones. When he was downgrade he rode them at seventy plus. Uphill he rode them at whatever speed the Mack would fetch.

That part was all right. Anyone who has pulled poultry will tell you that you have to ride them. They are packed so tight. You always lose a few. The job is to keep an airstream moving through the cages so they will not suffocate.

But the rest of what Joe Indian did was wrong. He was worse than trash. Men can get used to trash, but Joe bothered guys you would swear could not be bothered by anything in the world. Guys who had seen everything. Twenty years on the road, maybe. Twenty

years of seeing people broken up by stupidity. Crazy people, torn-up people, drunks. But Joe Indian even bothered guys who had seen all of that. One of the reasons might be that he never drank or did anything. He never cared about anything. He just blew heavy black exhaust into load after load of white turkeys.

The rest of what he did was worse. He hated the load. Not the way any man might want to swear over some particular load. No. He hated every one of those turkeys on every load. Hated it personally the way one man might hate another man. He treated the load in a way that showed how much he despised the easy death that was coming to most of those turkeys—the quick needle thrust up the beak into the brain the way poultry is killed commercially. Fast. Painless. The night I saw him close was only a week before the trouble started.

He came into a stop in Harrodsburg. I was out of Tennessee loaded with a special order of upholstered furniture to way and gone up in Michigan and wondering how the factory had ever caught that order. The boss had looked sad when I left. That made me feel better. If I had to fight tourists all the way up to the lake instead of my usual Cincinnati run, at least he had to stay behind and build sick furniture. When I came into the stop I noticed a

North Carolina job, one of those straight thirty or thirty-five footers with the attic. He was out of Hickory. Maybe one of the reasons I stopped was because there would be someone there who had about the same kind of trouble. He turned out to be a dark-haired and serious man, one who was very quiet. He had a load of couches on that were made to sell but never, never to use. We compared junk for a while, then looked through the window to see Joe Indian pull in with a truck that looked like a disease.

The Mack sounded sick, but from the appearance of the load it must have found seventy on the downgrades. The load looked terrible at close hand. Joe had cages that were homemade, built from siding of coal company houses when the mines closed down. They had horizontal slats instead of the vertical dowel rod. All you could say of them was that they were sturdy, because you can see the kind of trouble that sort of cage would cause. A bird would shift a little, get a wing-tip through the slat and the air stream would do the rest. The Mack came in with between seventy-five and a hundred broken wings fluttering along the sides of the crates. I figured that Joe must own the birds. No one was going to ship like that. When the rig stopped, the wings drooped like dead banners. It was hard to take.

"I know him," the driver who was sitting with me said.

"I know of him," I told the guy, "but, nothing good."

"There isn't any, any more," he said quietly and turned from the window. His face seemed tense. He shifted his chair so that he could see both the door and the restaurant counter. "My cousin," he told me.

I was surprised. The conversation kind of ran out of gas. We did not say anything because we seemed waiting for something. It did not happen.

All that happened was that Joe came in looking like his name.

"Is he really Indian?" I asked.

"Half," his cousin said. "The best half if there is any." Then he stopped talking and I watched Joe. He was dressed like anybody else and needed a haircut. His nose had been broken at one time. His knuckles were enlarged and beat-up. He was tall and rough-looking, but there was nothing that you could pin down as unusual in a tough guy except that he wore a hunting knife sheathed and hung on his belt. The bottom of the sheath rode in his back pocket. The hilt was horn. The knife pushed away from his body when he sat at the counter.

He was quiet. The waitress must have known him from before. She just sat coffee in front of him and moved away. If Joe had seen the driver beside me he gave no in-

dication. Instead he sat rigid, tensed like a man being chased by something. He looked all set to hit, or yell, or kill if anyone had been stupid enough to slap him on the back and say hello. Like an explosion on a hair-trigger. The restaurant was too quiet. I put a dime in the juke and pressed something just for the sound. Outside came the sound of another rig pulling in. Joe Indian finished his coffee, gulping it. Then he started out and stopped before us. He stared down at the guy beside me.

"Why?" the man said. Joe said nothing. "Because a man may come with thunder does not mean that he can ride the thunder," the driver told him. It made no sense. "A man is the thunder" Joe said. His voice sounded like the knife looked. He paused for a moment, then went out. His rig did not pull away for nearly ten minutes. About the time it was in the roadway another driver came in angry and half-scared. He headed for the counter. We waved him over. He came, glad for some attention.

"Jesus," he said.

"An old trick," the guy beside me told him.

"What?" I asked.

"Who is he?" The driver was shaking his head.

"Not a truck driver. Just a guy who happens to own a truck."

"But, how come he did that." The driver's voice sounded shaky.

"Did what?" I asked. They were talking around me.

The first guy, Joe's cousin, turned to me. "Didn't you ever see him trim a load?"

"What!"

"Truck's messy," the other driver said. "That's what he was saying. Messy. Messy." The man looked half sick.

I looked at them still wanting explanation. His cousin told me. "Claims he likes neat cages. Takes that knife and goes around the truck cutting the wings he can reach . . . just enough. Never cuts them off, just enough so they rip off in the air stream."

"Those are live," I said.

"Uh huh."

It made me mad. "One of these days he'll find somebody with about thirty-eight calibers of questions."

"Be shooting around that knife," his cousin told me. "He probably throws better than you could handle a rifle."

"But why . . ." It made no sense.

"A long story," his cousin said, "And I've got to be going." He stood up. "Raised in a coal camp," he told us. "That isn't his real name but his mother was full Indian. His daddy shot coal. Good money. So when Joe was a kid he was raised Indian, trees, plants, animals, mountains, flowers, men . . . all brothers. His ma was religious. When he became 16 he

was raised coal miner white. Figure it out." He turned to go.

"Drive careful," I told him, but he was already on his way. Before the summer was out Joe Indian was dead. But by then all of the truck traffic was gone from 150. The guys were routing through Lexington. I did not know at first because of trouble on the Michigan run. Wheel bearings in Sault Ste. Marie to help out the worn compressor in Grand Rapids. Furniture manufacturers run their lousy equipment to death. They expect every cube to run on bicycle maintenance. I damned the rig, but the woods up there were nice with stands of birch that jumped up white and luminous in the headlights. The lake and straits were good. Above Traverse City there were not as many tourists. But, enough. In the end I was pushing hard to get back. When I hit 150 it took me about twenty minutes to realize that I was the only truck on the road. There were cars. I learned later that the thing did not seem to work on cars. By then it had worked on me well enough that I could not have cared less.

Because I started hitting animals. Lots of animals. Possum, cat, rabbit, coon, skunk, mice, even birds and snakes . . . at night . . . with the moon tacked up there behind a thin and swirling cloud cover. The animals started marching, looking up off

the road into my lights and running right under the wheels.

Not one of them thumped!

I rode into pack after pack and there was no thump, no crunch, no feeling of the soft body being pressed and torn under the drive axle. They marched from the shoulder into the lights, disappeared under the wheels and it was like running through smoke. At the roadside, even crowding the shoulder, larger eyes gleamed from nebulous shapes that moved slowly back. Not frightened; just like they were letting you through. And you knew that none of them were real. And you knew that your eyes told you they were there. It *was* like running through smoke, but the smoke was in dozens of familiar and now horrible forms. I tried not to look. It did not work. Then I tried looking hard. That worked too well, especially when I cut on the spot to cover the shoulder and saw forms that were not men and were not animals but seemed something of both. Alien. Alien. I was afraid to slow. Things flew at the windshields and bounced off without a splat. It lasted for ten miles. Ordinarily it takes about seventeen minutes to do those ten miles. I did it in eleven or twelve. It seemed like a year. The stop was closed in Harrodsburg. I found an all night diner, played the juke, drank coffee, talked to a waitress who acted like I was trying to pick her

up, which would have been a compliment . . . just anything to feel normal. When I went back to the truck I locked the doors and climbed into the sleeper. The truth is I was afraid to go back on that road.

So I tried to sleep instead and lay there seeing that road stretching out like an avenue to nowhere, flanked on each side by trees so that a man thought of a high speed tunnel. Then somewhere between dream and imagination I began to wonder if that road really did end at night. For me. For anybody. I could see in my mind how a man might drive that road and finally come into something like a tunnel, high beams rocketing along walls that first were smooth then changed like the pillared walls of a mine with timber shoring on the sides. But not in the middle. I could see a man driving down, down at sixty or seventy, driving deep towards the center of the earth and knowing that it was a mine. Knowing that there was a rock face at the end of the road but the man unable to get his foot off the pedal. And then the thoughts connected and I knew that Joe Indian was the trouble with the road, but I did not know why or how. I was shaking and cold. In the morning it was not so bad. The movement was still there but it was dimmed out in daylight. You caught it in flashes. I barely made Mount

Vernon, where I connected with 25. The trouble stopped there. When I got home I told some lies and took a week off. My place is out beyond LaFollette, where you can live with a little air and woods around you. For awhile I was nearly afraid to go into those woods.

When I returned to the road it was the Cincinnati run all over with an occasional turn to Indianapolis. I used the Lexington route and watched the other guys. They were all keeping quiet. The only people who were talking were the police who were trying to figure out the sudden shift in traffic. Everybody who had been the route figured if they talked about it, everyone else would think they were crazy. You would see a driver you knew and say hello. Then the two of you would sit and talk about the weather. When truckers stop talking about trucks and the road something is wrong.

I saw Joe once below Livingston on 25. His rig looked the same as always. He was driving full out like he was asking to be pulled over. You could run at speed on 150. Not on 25. Maybe he *was* asking for it, kind of hoping it would happen so that he would be pulled off the road for a while. Because a week after that and a month after the trouble started I heard on the grapevine that Joe was dead.

Killed, the word had it, by

ramming over a bank on 150 into a stream. Half of his load had drowned. The other half suffocated. Cars had driven past the scene for two or three days, the drivers staring straight down the road like always. No one paid enough attention to see wheel marks that left the road and over the bank.

What else the story said was not good and maybe not true. I tried to dismiss it and kept running 25. The summer was dwindling away into fall, the oak and maple on those hills were beginning to change. I was up from Knoxville one night and saw the North Carolina job sitting in front of a stop. No schedule would have kept me from pulling over. I climbed down and went inside.

For a moment I did not see anyone I recognized, then I looked a second time and saw Joe's cousin. He was changed. He sat at a booth. Alone. He was slumped like an old man. When I walked up he looked at me with eyes that seemed to see past or through me. He motioned me to the other side of the booth. I saw that his hands were shaking.

"What?" I asked him, figuring that he was sick or had just had a close one.

"Do you remember that night?" He asked me. No lead up. Talking like a man who had only one thing on his mind. Like a man who could only talk about one thing.

"Yes," I told him, "and I've heard about Joe." I tried to lie. I could not really say that I was sorry.

"Came With Thunder," his cousin told me. "That was his other name, the one his mother had for him. He was born during an August storm."

I looked at the guy to see if he was kidding. Then I remembered that Joe was killed in August. It made me uneasy.

"I found him," Joe's cousin told me. "Took my car and went looking after he was three days overdue. Because . . . I knew he was driving that road . . . trying to prove something in spite of Hell."

"What? Prove what?"

"Hard to say. I found him hidden half by water, half by trees and the brush that grows up around there. He might have stayed on into the winter if someone hadn't looked." The man's hands were shaking. I told him to wait, walked over and brought back two coffees. When I sat back down he continued.

"It's what I told you. But, it has to be more than that. I've been studying and studying. Something like this . . . always is." He paused and drank the coffee, holding the mug in both hands.

"When we were kids," the driver said, "we practically lived at each other's house. I liked his best. The place was a shack. Hell, my place

was a shack. Miners made money then, but it was all scrip. They spent it for everything but what they needed." He paused, thoughtful. Now that he was telling the story he did not seem so nervous.

"Because of his mother," he continued. "She was Indian. Creek maybe but west of Creek country. Or maybe from a northern tribe that drifted down. Not Cherokee because their clans haven't any turkeys for totems or names that I know of . . ."

I was startled. I started to say something.

"Kids don't think to ask about stuff like that," he said. His voice was an apology as if he were wrong for not knowing the name of a tribe.

"Makes no difference anyway," he said. "She was Indian religious and she brought Joe up that way because his old man was either working or drinking. We all three spent a lot of time in the hills talking to the animals, talking to flowers . . ."

"What?"

"They do that. Indians do. They think that life is round like a flower. They think animals are not just animals. They are brothers. Everything is separate like people."

I still could not believe that he was serious. He saw my look and seemed discouraged, like he had tried to get through to people before and had not had any luck.

"You don't understand," he said. "I mean that dogs are not people, they are dogs. But each dog is important because he has a dog personality as same as a man has a man personality."

"That makes sense," I told him. "I've owned dogs. Some silly. Some serious. Some good. Some bad."

"Yes," he said. "But, most important. When he dies a dog has a dog spirit the same way a man would have a man spirit. That's what Joe was brought up to believe."

"But they kill animals for food," I told him.

"That's true. It's one of the reasons for being an animal . . . or maybe, even a man. When you kill an animal you are supposed to apologize to the animal's spirit and explain you needed meat."

"Oh."

"You don't get it," he said. "I'm not sure I do either but there was a time . . . anyway, it's not such a bad way to think if you look at it close. But the point is Joe believed it all his life. When he got out on his own and saw the world he couldn't believe it any more. You know? A guy acting like that. People cause a lot of trouble being stupid and mean."

"I know."

"But he couldn't quite not believe it either. He had been trained every day since he was born, and I do mean every day."

"Are they that religious?"

"More than any white man I ever knew. Because they live it instead of just believe it. You can see what could happen to a man?"

"Not quite."

"Sure you can. He couldn't live in the camp anymore because the camp was dead when the mines died through this whole region. He had to live outside so he had to change, but a part of him couldn't change . . . Then his mother died. Tuberculosis. She tried Indian remedies and died. But I think she would have anyway."

"And that turned him against it." I could see what the guy was driving at.

"He was proving something," the man told me. "Started buying and hauling the birds. Living hand to mouth. But, I guess everytime he tore one up it was just a little more hate working out of his system."

"A hell of a way to do it."

"That's the worst part. He turned his back on the whole thing, getting revenge. But always, down underneath, he was afraid."

"Why be afraid?" I checked the clock. Then I looked at the man. There was a fine tremble returning to his hands.

"Don't you see," he told me. "He still halfway believed. And if a man could take revenge, animals could take revenge. He was afraid of the animals helping out their brothers." The guy was sweating.

He looked at me and there was fear in his eyes. "They do, you know. I'm honest-to-God afraid that they do."

"Why?"

"When he checked out missing I called the seller, then called the process outfit where he sold. He was three days out on a one day run. So I went looking and found him." He watched me. "The guys aren't driving that road."

"Neither am I," I told him. "For that matter, neither are you."

"It's all right now," he said. "There's nothing left on that road. Right outside of Harrodsburg, down that little grade and then take a hook left up the hill, and right after you top it . . ."

"I've driven it."

"Then you begin to meet the start of the hill country. Down around the creek I found him. Fifty feet of truck laid over in the creek and not an ounce of metal showing to the road. Water washing through the cab. Load tipped but a lot of it still tied down. All dead of course."

"A mess."

"Poultry rots quick," was all he said.

"How did it happen?"

"Big animal," he told me. "Big like a cow or a bull or a bear . . . There wasn't any animal around. You know what a front end looks like. Metal to metal doesn't make that kind of dent. Flesh."

"The stream washed it away."

"I doubt. It eddies further down. There hasn't been that much rain. But he hit something . . ."

I was feeling funny. "Listen, I'll tell you the truth. On that road I hit everything. If a cow had shown up I'd have run through it, I guess. Afraid to stop. There wouldn't have been a bump."

"I know," he told me. "But Joe bumped. That's the truth. Hard enough to take him off the road. I've been scared. Wondering. Because what he could not believe I can't believe either. It does not make sense, it does not . . ." He looked at me. His hands were trembling hard.

"I waded to the cab," he said. "Waded out there. Careful of sinks. The smell of the load was terrible. Waded out to the cab hoping it was empty and knowing damned well that it wasn't. And I found him."

"How?"

"Sitting up in the cab sideways with the water swirling around about shoulder height and . . . Listen, maybe you'd better not hear. Maybe you don't want to."

"I didn't wait this long not to hear," I told him.

"Sitting there with the bone handle of the knife tacked to his front where he had found his heart . . . or something, and put it in. Not in time though. Not in time."

"You mean he was hurt and afraid of drowning?"

"Not a mark on his body except for the knife. Not a break anywhere, but his face . . . sitting there, leaning into that knife and hair all gone, chewed away. Face mostly gone, lips, ears, eyelids all gone. Chewed away, scratched away. I looked, and in the opening that had been his mouth something moved like disappearing down a hole . . . but, in the part of the cab that wasn't submerged there was a thousand footprints, maybe a thousand different animals . . ."

His voice broke. I reached over and steadied him by the shoulder. "What was he stabbing?" the man asked. "I can't figure. Himself, or . . ."

I went to get more coffee for us and tried to make up something that would help him out. One thing I agreed with that he had said. I agreed that I wished he had not told me.



"Know thyself," said Preston "are the two saddest words in English." And then he proposed his test—to tell the sane from the demented . . .

BUGHOUSE

by Doris Pitkin Buck

PRESTON GLANCED ACROSS HIS Georgetown patio as he proposed a toast. He bowed, a shade courtly, more than a shade ironic, as he lifted his glass toward his wife and their two guests.

"To the sane."

"Darling," it was his wife, of course. "For my money you're absolutely mad. What has sanity got to do with any of us?"

"My point exactly, Deborah. Watching the three of you, going over my own acts, I doubt everyone. *Know thyself*—the two saddest words in English. But once a man uses the scalpel on the motives of those he holds dear, he cannot stop. The need to inquire becomes a compulsion, a lemming drive toward the great sea of oblivion."

"Aren't you horribly rude, Preston?"

"On the contrary, I hope to

prove, in spite of considerable evidence to the contrary, that every one of us is sane." He smiled at his distinguished guest and the beautiful woman that guest had married.

"Oh, Preston, dry up, blow away, get lost. How can I keep up the slightest pretense of marital devotion when you start on a tirade?"

"Thank you for providing a case in point."

"I hardly understand my own husband," Deborah informed Charles and Isabel.

"He's too subtle for all of us," Charles answered. "Isabel and I only understand State Departmentese." The young-old man—resilience stamped on his face belying his snow-white hair—gave one of his familiar smiles, the one for newscasts, beamed straight at the onlooker. It told the viewer:

"We two understand each other." Charles' wife froze ever so slightly.

Preston suggested, "You wouldn't mind, would you, Isabel, telling us—strictly among friends—why that remark by Charles made you grow icicles among your briliants?" Preston looked at the glitter cascading below her ears. He urged her, "Come on. Tell."

"It would be a pleasure." Isabel's fingers tightened about the stem of a cocktail glass that held her fourth martini. "Charles carries people into our family—figuratively—every time he's on a newscast. He thought I married him for his overwhelming charm. That hardly had anything to do with it. I wanted a bulwark. I saw one in him. I shudder at our world. I want to shut most of it out. And—" she became unexpectedly shrill as she grew voluble "—and that gracious face welcomes too many people. Charles doesn't even need to talk. Every little housewife taking time off from washing the dishes, or whatever housewives do, gets into our privacy with that—that key my husband presents. Every—"

"That's enough, Isabel." Charles wore a different mask now, an impersonal one. "It's been a lovely evening, Preston. But we'd better be on our way."

"I'm not stirring, Charles." Isabel or her martini giggled. "I'm staying because I feel more sheltered here than at home with you."

Deborah turned quickly to her husband. "You started to propose a toast way back when. Please get on with it. *To the sane*, wasn't it? Well, since we're all sane, and nobody drinks a toast to himself—"

"Aren't you a smidgen verbose, Deborah?"

"I'm trying to keep the peace. When you're around, Prest, there ought to be one of those truces of God they had in the middle ages."

"*In vino veritas*," he said solemnly, as if he had just thought up the words. Then, "Here we are. Four wretched married people, trying to destroy the insecurity we've built instead of attempting, however late, to architect anything better. What do you do, Debby? Serve arsenic in molasses every time you open your fascinatingly shaped lips. Charles spreads out his charm for all and sundry though he's utterly weary of charming. He likes to infuriate Isabel, to egg her into outbursts she regrets. The sadist with the knife under the cloak, as one of our better poets didn't quite remark. What does Isabel do? You just saw."

"What do you do, darling, if I'm not too personal?"

"I told you. It didn't go over. Let me propose a test instead of my toast. I've been infected by the truth virus. Remember the good old picturesque term *bugs* for unfortunates we now term in emo-

tional disequilibrium, like men who shoot presidents, climb into hospital wards to cut nurses' throats, poison drinking fountains in kindergartens, hang still pretty mothers-in-law from cellar beams along with assorted moppets of their own begetting, smother—"

"Several speeches ago, Preston, I suggested Isabel and I leave. Come, Isabel."

Everyone felt her moor herself to the table. "You go. I like it here. When other people are . . . under attack . . . I feel protected. In a sort of way," she added pensively without a single hiccup.

"See, Charles, she won't let you run out on my test, though some State Department instinct warns you to. Good old instinct. But it isn't moving you a foot away this time. All reactions suffer presently from overuse. I propose now that we try something new I have in reserve." He went to a chest and got out a small ball, carefully wrapped. "This is *Sinister*. Bug poison," he explained. "Read the fine print on the English label. *Fatal to roaches, fleas* . . . the catalogue hardly matters. Here's the pay dirt, . . . *absolutely harmless to human beings*."

"Where'd you get this?" three people asked as one.

"In a den that reeked of opium. Embroidered dragons writhed if you watched them. The plum blossoms dropped petals which drifted off their scrolls on a wind

like a sigh and lay, spring snow, about me. Savagery was there, for one tiger on the wall began to purr, curling his great cat feet to unsheath talons used in love potions. In this entranced and entrancing spot I found myself—as a host might go to procure a vintage wine—asking for a test to tell the sane from the demented.

"'But,' the merchant objected, 'all persons are subject to moments of insanity.' He smiled behind a counter in his ancient, brocaded robe on which the figures turned a tender and poetic blue in the first moment when light caressed them, then appeared tintured with new bright blood. In an instant with his motion they were the ancient hue of *sang de boeuf*, a terrible color one almost smells. I observed the leaf gold of May and the tint that proves it an illusion, the green duller than any olive. At last he held out the globe I show you now. If you are human beings rather than insects, you have nothing to fear. He told me himself. I knew he spoke the truth, for his entire robe turned and remained grey."

Four pairs of eyes looked at the globe, wrapped in foil as opium is wrapped. A label painted on one of the thin tissues of the Orient was covered with lettering as emotional as screams or love murmurs, and as incomprehensible.

"Of course it might be poison,

Preston, darling. Had you thought of that?"

"Only to the mad, the everyday-all-twenty-four-hours mad."

"I'm not that crazy, if I'm crazy at all." Isabel picked up a small silver fruit knife. "I'll take your test, Preston." She cut off a cheese-like sliver. She popped the sliver into her mouth before Charles could hold her wrist down. She breathed, "Delicious."

"How does it make you feel, Isabel?" Deborah asked, her eyes riveted on her guest.

"Barrier . . . massive's the Great Wall of China . . . 's round me."

Almost before Isabel stopped speaking, Deborah reached for the bug poison and slashed out a sizable piece. Her eyes, natural triangles, blazed. Charles had an illusion: those eyes lighted his face, Isabel's face. Deborah's guests became a landscape of her creating.

Deborah dissolved what she had cut in her glass and drank off the thickened liquid. No one made a movement to stop her. Her once

luscious cheeks bloomed back contour after contour to blossom freshness. Preston let his lids droop. But Charles' hand reached toward a memory that once held immense significance. He took only a crumb on his knife tip and laid it directly on his tongue.

Preston said finally, "I suppose I have to prove I'm no coward." He picked up his own knife, its handle malachite, and thrust it into the sphere. A chunk crumbled out. He tasted with deliberation, lifting each fragment to his mouth slowly. He sat a long time, his head sunk on his breast.

"I expected to feel a little numb, at least," he told them. "To use a now antique term, I suspected we might all be bug-house. Perhaps the Oriental saw to it that I was taken for a ride. Well, well, we are as we are—"

He lifted his glass again in his Georgetown patio, about to propose his toast. His eyes widened. Three chairs were empty. He stood by himself, sane, superannuated, solitary.





THE LUNAR HONOR-ROLL

by Isaac Asimov

AS MY GENTLE READERS KNOW, MY FATHER contributed indirectly to my beginnings as a science fiction reader*. Eventually, when he came to understand that it was science fiction I was reading, memory stirred within him and said to me.

"Science fiction! Going to the Moon! Aha! Tell me, did you maybe ever read books by Zhoolvehrn?"

I stared at him blankly. "Who?"

"Zhoolvehrn," he repeated.

I was rather chagrined. I flattered myself that I knew the important writers of the world, together with the important *and* unimportant science fiction writers, and it annoyed me to be found wanting.

"What did he write?" I asked.

"Science fiction. Going to the Moon, and so on. —Oh, and he wrote a book about a man who went around the world in eighty days."

Light broke with blinding brilliance. I knew the author well, but my father had never heard the name pronounced in anything but the French fashion. I said (and in the excitement my stately Brooklyn accent became a trifle more prominent than usual), "Oh, sure. The author you mean is Joolz Voin."

And my father said, "Who?"

Anyway, however we might be divided by a common language, it turned out that my father and I both enjoyed science fiction. So it was a particular delight to me that when Neil Armstrong set foot upon the Moon he had done it not only within my own lifetime but even within my father's lifetime.

*See PORTRAIT OF THE WRITER AS A BOY, October 1966.

As an amazing way of dramatizing the speed with which technology is driving onward, consider that when my father was born (on December 21, 1896) no man had ever in all the history of the earth lifted himself from the ground in powered flight. There were balloons and gliders, but these were passive devices for floating on air and/or making use of the wind.

It was not till July 2, 1900, when my father was 3½ years old, that the first directed and completely controlled flight took place. (No, the date is not a mistake, and I'm not talking about the Wright Brothers.)

The inventor in question was Ferdinand, Count von Zeppelin. He conceived the notion of confining a balloon within a cigar-shaped structure of aluminum, making it both sturdier and aerodynamically more efficient. Beneath it he suspended a gondola bearing an internal-combustion engine which served to drive a propeller and to pull gondola and balloon through the air *even against the wind*.

Zeppelin had invented the zeppelin (what else) or the "dirigible balloon," meaning "balloon capable of being steered in flight." Inevitably, the latter phrase was shortened to "dirigible."

On December 17, 1903, just a few days before my father's 7th birthday, the Wright Brothers flew their airplane, and that was the first controlled flight of a *heavier-than-air vehicle*.

On March 16, 1926, when my father was 29 years old, Robert Hutchings Goddard sent up the first liquid-fueled rocket. The rocket travelled only 184 feet, but it was a portent of things to come. By 1944, when my father was 47 years old, much larger liquid-fueled rockets, developed by Wernher von Braun, were bombarding London.

On October 4, 1957, a rocket-propelled vehicle was, for the first time, placed in orbit about the Earth, and my father was 60 years old then. On April 12, 1961, when my father was 64, the first man-carrying vehicle was placed in orbit around the Earth.

And finally, on July 20, 1969, when my father was 72½, human footsteps appeared on the soil of the Moon.

Mankind had gone from a state of imprisonment on Earth's surface all the way to the Moon, and had done it all in the course of one not unusually long lifetime.

We must expect that this rapid sweep of technology will continue. There will be additional trips to the Moon; longer stays on its surface; a greater variety of experiments conducted there; and eventually the beginnings of a permanent base on the Moon which may and should develop into a colony.

In the course of all that, the names of various features on the Moon

will become familiar to all who read the newspapers and watch television. This will be good, for a number of romantic names will come into their own as well as a number of great and good men of the past. This will also be bad, for there will be ample opportunity for television announcers and others to mangle those names beyond recognition.*

But before the names become utterly banal through overuse, let's go through some of them.

The notion that it would be necessary to name features upon the Moon was not conceivable before June 1609, when Galileo looked at the Moon with his telescope. It was only then that astronomers realized that the Moon did not have a shiny, flat, polished, and (barring certain smudges) featureless surface. (This featurelessness had till then been assumed, in accordance with Aristotle's dictum of the perfection of the heavens.) Instead, the Moon had mountains and valleys and, in general, a surface at least as rough and various as that of the Earth.

Galileo drew the first map of the Moon, showing a few craters and one or two of the large dark areas. Succeeding astronomers, with better instruments, saw detail more clearly, and the maps began to improve. It also became more tempting to give names to the various features.

The first to draw maps of the Moon that were so good that we can actually detect the features of the lunar (loo'ner) surface as we recognize them today, was the German astronomer, Johannes Hevelius.

In 1647, he published a magnificent volume called "Selenographia," which was an atlas of the Moon's surface. He titled the features systematically, but avoided using personal names for fear of the envy and back-biting that might result. Instead, he followed the new view that the Moon was, after all, but a smaller Earth, and transferred the names of geography bodily into selenography. The various lunar mountain ranges were given the Earthly names of "Alps," "Appenine Mountains," "Carpathian Mountains," "Caucasian Mountains," and "Taurus Mountains."

These names have remained to this day, but, of course, this can give rise to confusion. It is customary even now, and will undoubtedly become obligatory later, to speak of the "Lunar Alps," the "Lunar Appenines" and so on.

*I am irritated, for instance, by the tendency of announcers to treat the word "lunar" as though it is an exotic recent invention. It is an old word, which is pronounced lyoo'ner or, by the less precise, loo'ner. The announcers, however, say loo'nahr', giving the syllables equal weight and exaggerating the second vowel as in "radar." I wonder how they would pronounce "popular", "vulgar" and other words of the sort that end in "ar" and are pronounced as though they end in "er." For that matter, do they speak of the soh'lahr' system?

Hevelius also named the large, dark areas "seas." By that time, it was already quite apparent that the likelihood of the Moon possessing surface air or water was low, but Hevelius was intent on using as many Earthly names as possible.

Happily, he did not name the seas literally for those on Earth, but indulged in fanciful flights.

He used Latin in his naming, of course, and called a sea a "mare" (pronounced rather like Mary in English), and the plural for this is "maria" (with the accent on the first syllable). It is just as well, for the seas are not seas in any Earthly sense, and it is much less confusing to speak of them, in general, as maria, even though the names of specific examples may still use "sea" for reasons of convenience and (yes) poetry.

Thus, the area on which the astronauts of Apollo 11 first landed was on the edge of Mare Tranquillitatis, which can be translated into English, most picturesquely, as the "Sea of Tranquillity." Considering the Moon's unchanging landscape (barring the occasional strike of a meteorite, the occasional split of a rock due to temperature change, the occasional outwelling of gas, powder, or lava from some rifts in the ground) this is a delightfully apt name. Almost immediately adjacent is the Mare Serenitatis or "Sea of Serenity."

Other names are far less apt, though it is unlikely that any will (or should) be changed even though most refer to the water that is conspicuously lacking on the Moon. Thus, without trying to be exhaustive, we have:

Mare Imbrium ("Sea of Showers")
Mare Nectaris ("Sea of Nectar")
Mare Humorum ("Sea of Moisture")
Mare Spumans ("Sea of Foam")
Mare Vaporum ("Sea of Steam")
Mare Undarum ("Sea of Waves.")

Most inappropriate of all is the Mare Foecunditatis ("Sea of Fertility.")

One particularly large mare is the Oceanus Procellarum ("Ocean of Storms"). The small dark areas get correspondingly smaller titles. There is the Lacus Somniorum ("Lake of Dreams"). There are the Sinus Iridum ("Bay of Rainbow") and Sinus Roris ("Bay of Dew") separated by a ridge of high ground.

A few features are accurately named. For instance, a flat area in the very middle of the visible face of the Moon is Sinus Medii ("Central Bay").

Where the real trouble will come, will be in the names of the craters. They are untranslatable, and a number are a trifle unpronounceable.

The fault lies with an Italian astronomer named Giovanni Battista Riccioli who, in 1651, published a book called "New Almagest," in which he included his own maps of the lunar surface—maps which were not as good as Hevelius's, by the way.

Riccioli departed from Hevelius's system of avoiding personalities and began the practice of naming the craters for dead astronomers (and other prominent people). To understand what he did, it is important to see what his astronomical beliefs were.

The key point is this: He rejected the views of Copernicus, who placed the Sun at the center of the planetary system. Riccioli was a conservative who clung as closely as possible to the time-honored and hoary astronomical views of the Greeks. He considered the Earth as the center of the universe and believed the heavenly bodies to be moving in perfect circles. He knew of Kepler's theory that the planets (and the Earth, too) travelled in ellipses about the Sun but dismissed that without deigning any argument. To those who pointed out that the Sun-centered Copernician system was preferable because it was far simpler than the older Earth-centered Ptolemaic system, Riccioli countered that the more complicated the system, the better its testimony to the greatness and glory of God.

Back in 1577, the Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe, had proposed a compromise. He suggested that all the planets (Earth excluded) moved about the Sun in circular paths as Copernicus suggested, but that the Sun *with* its circling planets moved about the Earth. This system captured many of the virtues of the Copernican system without abandoning the basic Greek assumption of the Earth as center of the Universe.

As a compromise it was virtually still-born, but a few conservatives clung to it for dear life as the only alternative to a complete abandonment of Earth-centered doctrine (an abandonment they feared would have important theological overtones). Riccioli was one of those who clung to the Tychonic modification of the Earth-centered view.

Well, Riccioli's naming of the craters reflected his estimate of the relative worth of astronomers.

Thus, there are three particularly prominent craters on the Moon, three that were perhaps the most recently formed of the large ones. Each is surrounded by a system of rays, straight lines of light material that go streaking out from the crater in all directions and which seem to be dust sprayed out of the crater in its formation. All large craters probably had rays associated with them, but in time those rays were obliterated by

later strikes. In the case of these three I'm talking about there seem to have been no later strikes of great account.

By far the most prominent of the three is near the lunar south pole (near the top of the globe in most photographs which usually have south on top and north below).

When the Sunlight strikes straight down on this crater, it becomes exceedingly bright. It and its ray system stand out from their surroundings to the point where the Moon looks like a navel orange with the crater itself serving as the navel. Or, if one is exceedingly naïve, it looks as though the Moon has a literal "north pole" with visible meridians. The crater is the most magnificent single crater on the Moon, both on the visible side and the hidden side.

What would Riccioli call that crater, do you suppose? One would scarcely need to be uncertain, in view of his predilections. He named it Tycho (tie'koh, in English).

The other two craters, also magnificent but far less so than Tycho, he named Copernicus and Kepler. Still, let's not complain, for if he had less scientific integrity, he might have omitted those Sun-centered gentlemen altogether.

Again, near the center of the Moon's visible disc, is a grouping of four large craters located at the corners of an imaginary diamond-shaped figure.

The largest of these, Riccioli called Ptolemaeus (tol'uh-mee'us) after Claudius Ptolemaeus (better known in English as Ptolemy), who, in the 2nd Century A.D., summarized the work of the Greek astronomers in a book that was one of the few that survived from ancient times. It was often referred to by the admiring Greeks as "Megiste" ("Greatest"), and the Arabs affixed their own definite article and made it "Almagest." Notice that Riccioli called his own book "New Almagest."

Immediately to the northeast of Ptolemaeus, on the opposite angle of the diamond, is a somewhat smaller crater which Riccioli named Hipparchus (hih-pahr'kus). Hipparchus was the greatest of all the Greek astronomers, and though his own writings are lost, they formed the chief basis on which Ptolemy worked out his system. Hipparchus was the first to work out the Earth-centered view of the universe in full and satisfactory mathematical detail, but it was Ptolemy, the summarizer, rather than Hipparchus, the creator, who gave his name to the since-called "Ptolemaic system." And it is Ptolemy who gets the bigger crater, too. There are vast injustices in scientific history, as elsewhere.

On the other two angles of the diamond are a pair of craters named for medieval supporters of the Ptolemaic view. One is Albategnius (al'buh-

teg'nee-us), which is the Latinized version of the name of a tenth-century Arabic astronomer, al-Battani, the greatest of all medieval astronomers.

The other, just south of Ptolemaeus and, indeed, encroaching upon it, is Alphonsus (al-fon'sus), which is named for a Castilian monarch, Alfonso X, usually called "Alfonso the Wise." He was an unsuccessful king from the politico-military standpoint, but he was noted for his scholarship, for his encouragement of learning, for the schools he founded and the law codes he organized.

Under his patronage the first history of Spain was written, and Jews of Toledo prepared a new and particularly good translation of the Old Testament. He himself wrote poetry, as well as alchemical commentaries.

His place on the Moon arises from the fact that he encouraged the preparation of revised planetary tables, tables that could be used to predict the location of the planets at any given time, past or future. (Ideally, at least, but in practice they were increasingly inaccurate for larger and larger intervals of time in either direction.) They were published in 1252, on the day of his accession to the throne. These "Alfonsine Tables" proved the best the Middle Ages had to offer and were not replaced by better ones for over three centuries.

Riccioli might have had a few doubts, perhaps, as to the propriety of giving Alfonso so prominent a crater. After all, the royal scholar did cast doubt on the Ptolemaic system. During the tedious preparation of the tables on the basis of the complicated mathematics made necessary by insisting on Earth-as-center, Alfonso is supposed to have said, in exasperation, that had God asked his advice during the days of the creation, he would have strongly recommended a simpler design for the universe.

The ancient astronomer who is most likely to impress moderns is the 4th Century B.C. Aristarchus (ar'is-tahr'kus), if for no other reason than the modernity of his views.

He was the first to make an accurate measurement of the distance of the Moon, and he attempted to make one of the Sun as well. His method of measurement was perfectly correct in theory, but he was hampered by the lack of proper instruments that would enable him to reach sufficient precision, and his estimate of the Solar distance therefore fell far short of the truth.

Aristarchus was the first to advance the suggestion that the planets, *including* the Earth, all revolved about the Sun. For his pains, he was

laughed at heartily, and at least one philosopher (Cleanthes the Stoic) demanded he be tried for impiety. Aristarchus' works have not survived since few scribes would get the necessary fee required to copy over those crackpot theories and the only way in which we know about those theories is that other Greek philosophers refer to them sneeringly.*

The views of Aristarchus have survived through these references throughout the Middle Ages. Copernicus seems to have known of them since he mentioned them in a passage of the manuscript he was writing, a mention he later cautiously crossed out.

One wonders, then, why we speak of the Copernican system rather than the Aristarchean. In this case, though, it is not a matter of injustice; Copernicus deserves the credit. Although Aristarchus had the right idea, he did not work out the mathematics of planetary motion on the basis of a Sun-centered system. One of the reasons that the Greeks turned to Hipparchus and his Earth-centered system, was that Hipparchus supplied the necessary mathematics for his view.

When Copernicus came along he, *for the first time*, supplied astronomers with the necessary Sun-centered mathematics and that is why he deserves the credit.

Riccioli had the grace to name a crater for Aristarchus, but his prejudices show. Where Hipparchus and Ptolemy got large centrally located craters, Aristarchus got a small one far to the northwest.

The largest crater clearly visible on the side of the Moon facing us is Clavius (klay'vee-us). This honor is granted a competent German astronomer, much honored in his own time, but virtually unknown now. His chief virtue in Riccioli's eyes was, of course, that he rejected the Copernican system.

Riccioli did not use the names of astronomers only in marking his craters. He also employed the names of politicians and other notables toward whom he felt sympathetic and whom he thought ought to be honored.

Since Riccioli's time, additional craters have been named for luminaries who have lived after him, and the concentration has been heavily on scientists, preferably astronomers.

The map of the Moon has thus become a resounding listing (an honest honor-roll) of astronomical accomplishment. There is a strong

*Of course, I like to make disparaging remarks about crackpot notions (or what I consider crackpot notions) myself as in *WORLDS IN CONFUSION* (October 1969). I know that there is a danger that someday someone will say something like, "The only way we know of so-and-so's important and world-shaking theories is from Asimov's sneering references—" but I'll take that chance.

representation, thanks to Riccioli and others, of ancient philosophers. In addition to those already mentioned, here are a few who are to be found among the craters: Anaxagoras. (an"ak-sag'oh-ras), Anaximander (uh-nak'sih-man'der), Anaximenes (an"ak-sim'ih-neeze), Archimedes (ahr"kih-mee'deeze), Aristoteles (ari-is-toh'tih-leeze, better known to us as Aristotle), Eratosthenes (er"uh-tos'thih-neeze), Euclides (yoo-klih'deeze, better known to us as Euclid), Eudoxus, (eu-dok'sus), Philolaus (fil'oh-lay'us), Posidonius (pos"ih-doh'nee-us), Pythagoras (pih-thag'oh-ras), and Thales (thay'leeze).

What a field for mispronunciation.

There are some Arabic astronomers preserved in the crater honor-roll that are wonders, too. How about Arzachel, for instance. He was an eleventh-century Moslem astronomer in Spain, and his proper Arabic name was Ibn al-Zarqala. I'm not at all sure how one pronounces Arzachel; my guess is ahr-zak'el, but I could easily be wrong.

There are relatively modern crater names that can give trouble, too. In the eighteenth century, there was a French scholar named Jean Sylvain Bailly, who wrote important histories of astronomy. He also participated in the French Revolution and was mayor of Paris in 1789. French politicians in those days made being guillotined a kind of hobby and Bailly was no exception. He got it in the neck in 1793.

In time, a crater was named for him; a large one, even larger than Clavius, but so far toward the edge it couldn't be made out clearly till the days of the rocket-probes came.

The name, Bailly, is pronounced, French-fashion, as bah-yee', but we can very safely bet that no American on the Moon will call the crater anything but bay'lee.

Among the modern astronomers listed on the lunar honor-roll are Bessel, Bond, Cassini, Flammarion, Flamsteed, Herschel, Huggins, Lassell, Messier, Newton and Pickering. Of famous men who are *not* primarily astronomers there are, for example: Cuvier, Guericke, Gutenberg, Herodotus and Julius Caesar. There's also a crater named for Riccioli himself and one which, in ecumenical fashion, is named Rabbi Levi.

The Soviets continued Riccioli's system in naming the craters on the other side of the Moon, and introduced one very important innovation. They named a crater for a science fiction writer—Jules Verne (zhool-vehrn, joolz voyn, take your pick).

I don't want to suggest that this be carried on to ridiculous extremes,* but I think it's fair to hope that a crater can be found for Ed-

*Yes, I do, a little bit, and you know why.

gar Allan Poe and another for Herbert George Wells.

What's more, I think a crater should be named for the late, great science writer, Willy Ley, who, more than anyone else in the world managed to make ordinary mankind rocket-conscious. He died three weeks before the lunar landing he had waited all his life to see, and surely there is a crater somewhere that belongs to him.

But now, with the indulgence of the Gentle Readers, I want to return to the subject of the opening of the essay.

On August 4, 1969, two weeks after the lunar landing and four days ago, as I write, my father died without undue or prolonged suffering, and after having been quite active, both physically and mentally, to the very end. I would like, in his honor, to tell another story about him.

My father always took the attitude that whatever worldly success and acclaim I achieved was simply what he expected of me and no more, and so he maintained a constant stern air of calm acceptance. To act visibly pleased would, in his eyes (I imagine) have merely served to spoil me. (Behind my back, however, he was constantly praising me to all who would listen, and my mother, just as constantly, reported it all.)

Only once did this attitude falter. He had taken it for granted that I knew about science, but when I started publishing books on ancient history, he pulled me to one side and (looking furtively about as though he didn't want to be caught in this act of weakness) said, "Tell me, Isaac, how do you come to know all these things?"

And I said, "I learned them from you, Pappa."

He thought I was joking and I had to explain my meaning to him, as I will now explain it to you.

My father came to this country, in adult life, with no formal education in the ordinary sense (though he was extremely learned in Talmudic lore). He could never as much as help me with my homework.

What he could do, however, and what he did do, was to instil in me (and in my brother) a love of learning and a delight in explaining so firmly and so deeply that there was never any danger of losing it—and everything else followed quite automatically, and without particular credit to myself.

This avidity for learning and explaining has, as it happens, brought me a measure of material success—but quite aside from that, it has brought me an enrichment of life in a hundred ways beyond anything which can be measured by money or by any other palpable standard.

Thank you, Pappa.

Robin Scott is founder and director of the Clarion College Writers' Workshop in Science Fiction and Fantasy, which has been in existence only two years, but whose attendees have already made an exceptional number of sales in the sf field (e. g., Neil Shapiro's "From the Moon, With Love," which will be featured in next month's F&SF). Mr. Wilson's own work, in F&SF and elsewhere, has certainly set a superior standard for his students, and this latest story—a crackling, off-beat Iron Curtain thriller—is a fine sample.

A DELICATE OPERATION

by Robin Scott

IT WAS IN EARLY AUGUST, 1969, that we first got word of Stegner's desire to defect. It came from a penetration agent we had targeted against Stegner's laboratory in Magdeburg. Stegner was unquestionably the most competent neurosurgeon and physiologist behind the Iron Curtain; according to the experts on the Outfit's Bio-Medical Staff back in Washington, he and the team of bright young men he had trained were well ahead of anybody in the West in the field of transplants and immune-reaction suppression. We were not surprised, therefore, when Washington's response to our initial report was a terse cable which said in effect: "Get

him out! To hell with the cost!"

And we could see Washington's point. Not only would Stegner be a real addition to the CORFEX Project down in St. Petersburg, but his loss to the East might seriously impede efforts there to parallel what our people in CORFEX were doing in the development of bio-mechanical computation and guidance devices. It has long been a safe bet that if we in the West are onto something hot in the way of a technological breakthrough, our friends across the Curtain are too. And we had substantial evidence to suggest that the center of Bloc bio-mechanical research was in Stegner's labora-

tory buried deep in the rambling, grey walls of the *Staatliche Krankenhaus* in Magdeburg. Stegner's successful exfiltration would earn the West a prize, my boss the cushy job in Washington he so longed for, and me a minimum one-grade promotion. Which, since I was unmarried and without major financial responsibilities, was not so important for the increase in salary it would bring as for the elimination of one more echelon of bureaucrats from whom I had to take a measure of crap. All in all, it was worth trying.

But the question was, how? My boss, having gotten to be a boss by shoving the responsibility for the really hairy ones off onto others, kindly handed me the whole problem. He is an honest man, I'll give him that, and it was true that a failure in the Stegner operation—while it might damage me—would ruin him. "Sink, Jack," he said in his plush GS-16's office, "or swim. If you make it, we are all heroes. If you screw up, it is your ass. Your's alone." I thanked him profusely for his wise counsel and bowed myself out to return to my barren GS-13's cell in the sub-basement of our Berlin office, IMPORTEX GmbH. I considered briefly passing the unpleasant mandate on to one of my underlings, but I knew they'd mess it up, and I wanted that promotion. So I went to work.

Exfiltration is an 'uncertain business at best. It is always easier to get into a prison than it is to get out. The guards, the security system, the armament is inside, not out. And this generalization is particularly true as it applies to East Germany, whose border is one of the most impenetrable in the world. There is much more to it than the much-publicized Berlin Wall; its twelve kilometers of masonry are actually one of the weakest links in the hundreds and hundreds of kilometers of electrified fences, moats, mine fields, and watch towers that form a squirming line from Swinemunde on the Baltic southwards to Ratibor on the Czech border. There are no mine fields in metropolitan Berlin. But then, the East Germans compensate in Berlin with half a dozen companies of *Volkspolizei*—VOPOs—who do very well with their machine guns and dogs.

I guess at one time or another I have tried just about every method of getting someone out of East Germany, or seen others try. There are the tunnelers and the wall climbers and the people who try to smash through in stolen construction equipment. There are the river swimmers and the boat stealers and the airplane hijackers, and most of these types get out of East Germany all right, but they are more often than not dead by the time they crash or

wash up or are dug out in the West. There was even the clever group of East Berlin kids who patched together a balloon out of hundreds of cheap plastic rain-coats, heat-sealed into a rough sphere and inflated with illuminating gas atop a Kopernikusstrasse apartment house during an easterly blow in April. A tracer from a VOPO's *Maschinenpistole* produced a spectacular blast two hundred meters over Unter den Linden, and the West Berlin police buried the three unfortunates in the Tiergarten, under an impressive memorial stone, which is regularly decorated with flowers by the little old ladies in black who look after such things in Berlin.

The trouble with all these schemes is that—even if they work—they only work once, and then the East Germans tighten up on whatever security hiccup was involved and catch the next dozen people who try the same trick. Next time you see a picture of Checkpoint Charlie or one of the other East-West crossing points, notice that the boom across the road has a piece of two-inch angle iron extending below it by eight or ten inches; back in the early sixties, a daring young Englishman discovered that his old MG roadster would just slip under the boom with the windshield down, and he got his fiancée out that way. The next man who tried it was decapitated.

So I had a problem on my hands. But the first step, even before I had figured out a workable exfiltration plan, was to get word back to Dr. Stegner that we were aware of his desire and working on the problem. This is always important: when a man like Stegner makes the big decision, it is usually because of some pressing personal problem—money, sex, imminent political ruin—and he is impatient to seek some immediate solution, likely to take some rash and desperate action. Seldom is the motivation of a defector really ideological, some burning desire to “live in freedom,” worshiping at the feet of The Great Society. When I was a very young man, new to the espionage and clandestine action business, I was surprised and a bit disillusioned at how rare ideological motivation was. Now I am older, my own motivation has changed, grown confused, and I am no longer surprised that money, status, a shrewish wife or a young lover, are the principal springs to so dangerous an act as defection. From either side.

Accordingly, as soon as I could set up a brush contact with “Karl”, the courier who serviced our penetration agent in Magdeburg, I prepared a microdot message for Dr. Stegner. I spent a lot of time at it, the composition, I mean. The microdot itself is a matter of minutes in the dark-

room and hours with an X-acto blade, balsam gum, and a suitable cover letter with lots of good, black type. I wrote Dr. Stegner in my finest German, telling him of financial opportunities in the West, of professional berths that could be readily arranged, of the prevalence of "good things" in Western life. My letter was pretty comprehensive; I had no idea at that stage what his motivation was. I didn't know if he wanted money, greater professional opportunity, or just plain unlimited poontang. If he was like a lot of Germans I had dealt with, he wanted all three, plus something on the order of a tall Aryan blonde in high-heeled boots with a whip.

I ended by instructing him, if he was interested in our aid, to come to East Berlin—an hour's drive from Magdeburg—to walk to Marx-Engels Platz, to face the Brandenburg Gate some 1700 meters to the west, and to silently mouth his answer along with any additional comments he might wish to make. I gave him a time and a date, with an alternative should there be fog or other poor visibility. It was the safest possible communications method for him.

I like to do my own communications, and it was a couple of days before I got the cover letter—actually a piece of East German propaganda in praise of

Walter Ulbricht—prepared for the courier. Microdots are fine, but they must be carefully concealed, under a halftone dot or a period in the text. And then they have to be recoverable, which means carefully measuring, always from the left-hand margin, always from the bottom of the page, so that the coordinates, in millimeters, can be given as a series of digits. In this case, the courier, "Karl," was instructed to tell our man in Magdeburg to give Stegner the paper and tell him simply: "*Ein Punkt, Herr Professor Doktor. Abszisse vierundzwanzig, Ordinate hundertdreißig.*" It was reasonable to expect that a scientist could follow the directions without difficulty and would examine the *Punkt* under his microscope without specific instructions to do so.

And he did. On the day and at the time appointed, the weather was fair, the perennial Berlin inversion off on vacation somewhere over the Alps. From the top of the Reichstag building down along the Wall, I could see for miles into East Berlin, the horizon broken only by blue-grey gasometers, innumerable church spires, and the great, monolithic, neo-Soviet facade of the *Haus der Kultur* on Clara-Zetkin Strasse. At that distance, I did not try to spot Stegner. I simply cut loose with the Bolex trained on Marx-Engels Platz. It was

equipped with a monstrous thousand-millimeter lens, and I let it run until it had exhausted a three-hundred meter magazine of ultra-fine grain film, the kind they used to use on the old U-2 sweeps, with a resolution down to a handful of microns. The British corporal with me (the Reichstag is in the British Sector and a limey has to accompany you whenever you use it operationally) looked at me curiously, I suppose because I wasn't panning the camera, but he asked no questions.

I sent the film back to Washington on the first courier flight for processing and interpretation by one of the Outfit's German-speaking lip readers. Three days later, I got back the typescript along with the full trace-report on Stegner. There was damn little information in the report, but enough to give me an idea about his motivation: Dr. Stegner, it turned out, had been described by "a reliable source" as a *warmer Bruder*, a homosexual. If true, it explained his desire to get out. Marxist-Leninist governments are about as tolerant of sexual aberrancy in those engaged in classified work as is the FBI. Too valuable to be simply discharged, trapped by his own brilliance, Stegner must have been a miserable man.

The lip reader's typescript was a long one; there had been a lot of people in the Platz that day:

"... he told me he couldn't get it at the HO store and that I should apply to the Oberbürgermeister for a permit . . ."

That wasn't it.

"... she said she'd seen bigger ones in the zoo, in the monkey house, and I gave her a crack in the . . ."

That wasn't it.

"... 'socialist realism?' Scheiss! I say it's bad art and . . ."

That wasn't it.

"... yes, yes, yes. I am in agreement. But it will have to be done very carefully. I am already in difficulty. I will be at the meeting of the International Physiological Society in Leipzig in September. We can make contact there . . . Ah! Good morning, Officer. I'm afraid I *do* sometimes talk to myself. A professor, you know. Yes. Ha. Ha. Perfectly all right, Officer . . ."

That was it.

So okay. We had our bunny and he was willing. The next thing to do was to come up with the perfect exfiltration plan. There are two basic ways to get somebody out from behind the curtain. One way, "black", you consider the person to be exfiltrated as no more than a "thing" of such and such dimensions which must be concealed in some other thing that can freely exit the country. People have come out hung up along with frozen

beef carcasses in refrigerator trucks; they have come out wrapped inside reels of cable; they have made it in suitcases and trunks and shipping crates and coffins. The trouble with all these methods is that they have already been used, and the East Germans are onto them. They routinely gas the contents of trucks, run high voltages through coffins, x-ray trunks and crates.

Another way is to bring the bunny out "white," with false papers which provide him with an identity and cover story good enough to fool an experienced and intelligent border-guard officer. But the East Germans had begun to counter this possibility by computerizing their border records. And no one gets out unless there is a record of his having gone in. It works like this: suppose you are a Danish businessman with dealings in Dresden. You cross over at Friedrichstrasse, and there the details of your identity documents along with a coded description of you is cranked into the central computer in Pankow. Then, when you exit, no matter where, before you are permitted to leave, the guards there get a near-instantaneous computer-run on you by telephone. If your documents and your physical appearance don't match the records to a T, you are in trouble. One way to beat the system, of course, is to send in a

ringer, somebody who can be properly documented and who looks enough like the bunny so that they can swap identities for a few hours until the bunny is home free. The trouble is, the ringer is stuck inside. Making the physical match isn't so difficult, but while there are plenty of people the Outfit cheerfully considers expendable, few if any of them consider themselves so. And it is hard to find a man willing to spend a good chunk of his life in an East German prison, no matter how much you are willing to pay into a Swiss bank for him.

So, as I knew I would, I got my staff to work on getting Stegner out black. We did what we call a "closed system analysis." You look at East Germany as a hermetically sealed mechanism, which of course it isn't, and then examine all the points around its perimeter through which goods and people move. You check on rail shipments, truck lines, the tiny tourist traffic, movement of such bulk commodities as grain and coal along the barge canals, and you look for opportunities, little weaknesses that no one else has exploited. It is a little like a writer looking for a fresh plot, knowing full well there really ain't such an animal.

While the staff was busy on the exfiltration problem, I was trying to solve three other difficulties. First off, I needed as full

a dossier as possible on Stegner so that we could tailor whatever plan we came up with to his specific physical and psychological characteristics. There's no point in planning to ship a six-foot-four claustrophobe out in a trunk. Second, I had to establish a better means of communication, a channel that could carry far more information than the microdot-and-movie camera system. I had to find someone who could meet plausibly with Stegner at the September meeting in Leipzig, someone totally innocent of prior intelligence connections. And finally, although it seemed premature, I had to anticipate difficulties in getting Stegner into the United States if we did get him out of East Germany. You can't legally bring a man into our progressive and democratic republic if he is suffering from tuberculosis (which Stegner undoubtedly was not), if he has been a member of a national communist party (which Stegner, in his position, probably was), or if he is a homosexual (which Stegner most evidently was). There are ways of getting around all these restrictions, but they take time, and I wanted to get all my ducks in a row before firing the first, irrevocable shot.

The communications problem was the most pressing. I asked for and got a machine-run of free-world scientists who had been in-

vited to the Leipzig conference. I eliminated the few Americans and all the West Germans from the list; they would automatically arouse suspicion. I was left with a handful of Britishers, some Scandinavians, and a couple of Italians and Frenchmen. Neither Frenchmen had shown any interest in immune-reaction chemistry, would have little excuse for lengthy contact with Stegner. One of the Italians was in his eighties and the other was a former deputy to Togliatti. And so it went down through the list until I came to one Britisher who looked possible.

I packed a bag, said good-bye to Krista, the girl I had been living with, and caught the afternoon BEA for London. Krista was sour and I was tired. I had been working every waking moment for ten days on the Stegner operation. As I left the flat, Krista began packing. I wanted to say to myself, "easy come, easy go," but for about the four hundredth time I regretted the business I was in. Krista was certainly replaceable, but I was beginning to feel my forty years. Kristas were getting just a bit harder to come by each year.

Celia Austin was her name, the Britisher on my list who looked worth approaching for recruitment as a courier to Stegner. She lived in one of those little polished gems of town houses off

Montpelier Square in Knightsbridge, all painted stone and window boxes and black iron-rimmed front steps arching over cellar entrance. I had called her directly from the airport, explained I was the representative of an American publisher interested in doing a U.S. edition of her book on antigen chemistry, apologized for not writing in advance, asked if I might just possibly drop by for a moment to discuss the matter. She was most frightfully rushed, but yes, for a moment. She was interested in the book.

My first reaction to her, standing on the steps of the town house, was pretty unprofessional. I had expected something in shapeless grey tweeds and sensible shoes, something starchy and permed. What I found was tall and brunette and soft and very, very beautiful. She was dressed modestly mod, short and rather full suede skirt above long legs, long-sleeved red jersey turtleneck over a magnificent English chest, little hoop earrings and a matching necklace of golden circlets splayed across her collarbones, prominent under the jersey. Only her eyes, which were handsome enough, belied the image of soft femininity she projected. The eyes were hard, almost masculine under her strong brows.

Her greeting was properly reserved, filled with the Englishman's ritual gush. "Do come in,

Mr. Haskins. I'm so terribly sorry that I can't give you more time. But perhaps . . ." She bowed me into a Victorian sitting room, the kind of room that is done by a decorator for people with money and taste, but no time.

I went into my cover spiel, I'm afraid, with only half my mind. The other half was imagining all sorts of very improper things its possessor wanted to do with Celia Austin. Midway through the pitch, I got hold of myself and concentrated on what I was doing. The tough thing about a cold pitch is you have to keep the subject's interest up while very carefully observing his reactions to certain key phrases; it is the only way you can get a quick handle on his motivations and begin to plan some method of appealing to them. Veiled references to sex, to travel, to adventure produced no reaction in those cold eyes. References to immune-reactions, to publication, and to money did.

After half an hour, I feigned desperate hunger after dangling talk of a contract in front of her, and she reluctantly agreed to dine with me. But I had exhausted my cover story and her patience by the time we had spent an hour in the staid dignity of Simpsons'. She was all business, interested as long as I was on her favorite subject—her career as deputy to the Chief Surgeon at St. James—but unwilling, or unable, to talk of anything

else. I am a reasonably good-looking man, and not without a fair amount of experience, both professional and personal, in "developing" women, but Dr. Austin was solid ice. As soon as I had run out of fictional gas, she glanced at her watch, made polite but unconvincing excuses about "hospital", and left in a taxi. She left me with a very large lump of dissatisfaction with the evening, nestled down there somewhere with Simpsons' roast beef and Brussels sprouts. It looked like I might get her with the book—which the Outfit could certainly arrange—but I wanted something else, I wanted to get her with *me*, I guess. Maybe it was the scene earlier that day with Krista. Maybe it was that she was one of the most beautiful women I had ever met. Maybe it was just that I was forty.

I let it rest a day and checked into our London office for traces on her. They had nothing derogatory, other than her avowed taste for the politics of Bertrand Russell, which might give some of the Neanderthals back in Washington the whim-whams but didn't bother me in the least. It was probably her politics that had gotten her the invitation to Leipzig in the first place. Otherwise, the fairly voluminous file the London people had compiled on her told me little. She had never been married, although she was now pushing thirty-five, and there was no indication of lov-

ers. I wondered briefly if she were a dyke, but both my own observations and the files failed to confirm any realistic suspicion that she was lesbian. Apparently, she was simply one of those sexless career women whose whole lives are concentrated on matters other than those controlled by the ductless glands. Hell, there are such women, just as there are such men; any government office is full of them. I simply had never before run into one whose physical characteristics made me want to say so vehemently, what a shame! what a waste of good material! And I felt an irrepressible urge to make a conversion, like a missionary with a heathen.

The next evening, I took another crack at it, mostly out of duty, but partly from personal compulsion. I got the boys in the London shop to hoke up a publisher's contract and a check for £500 as a binder, and with these as bait, I managed to persuade Dr. Austin to dine with me again. This time I took her to a little place in Chelsea where they serve good charcoal-broiled steaks and some splendid burgundies. My heart fell when she ordered her steak well-done; girls who do what I want girls to do don't eat well-done steak. Still, I got two martinis in her before dinner, a half-bottle of Pommard during dinner, and a good-sized brandy after. It was enough so that her sense of

time faltered and she agreed—albeit reluctantly—that we might better finish our business in the privacy of her house.

There, pawing and snorting internally, I got another brandy in her, but that was clearly all I was going to get. I tried every ploy I could think of, the distillation of over twenty years of dilligent practice in the fine art of seduction, all the time dangling talk about reprint contracts, subsidiary rights, paperback editions (for a book on antigen chemistry!), and big-time authors' tax dodges.

She yawned at a very tender moment. "All right, Mr. Haskins. I think we have wasted enough time on pleasantries. If you will be so kind as to give me the contract, I will be happy to sign it and we can both go back to our business."

Pleasantries! Years of experience under the harshest kinds of operational circumstances, and she calls it "pleasantries"! I was offended.

I moved closer to her on the plush-covered Victorian sofa. I blew gently in her ear.

"Oh dear. You *do* have that in mind, don't you."

"Yes."

"Um. I was afraid so." She did not move away, but sat relaxed, her brow furrowed in thought. "It's always so difficult."

"It is not difficult at all. Easiest thing in the world."

"Um. Yes. I suppose it is, as

you mean it." She stood and began to unfasten the hook behind her neck, at the top of the zipper. "I take it, it is part of the book contract?"

That stopped me. A little nudge, a bit of discreet pressure, is sometimes an aid to overcoming initial resistance; it is usually quickly submerged in subsequent events. But this was getting pretty crass.

She hesitated with the dress over head, up on her arms, standing there in bra and half-slip. "Well, Mr. Haskins. Is it or isn't it?"

I swallowed. I didn't want it like that. "No, it isn't."

She shrugged the dress back on, not bothering to re-zip it. She sighed with impatience. "Then give me the contract and let's put an end to this tiresome business."

"But, a moment ago . . ."

She gave me her curiously masculine look. "See here, Mr. Haskins. I am a woman, a very handsome one. I know what sex is worth and I am not the least bit reluctant to use it. But it is something I use; it does not use me. I find the whole matter tiresome, and if I do not need to use it, I prefer not to."

My libido and a good chunk of my masculine pride went into hibernation. Celia Austin was absolutely the coldest woman—hell, *person*—I had ever met. I got down to business. I was suddenly

in a hurry to get back to Berlin. Maybe I could dig up Krista, persuade her . . .

"All right, Dr. Austin. My mistake. There will be no sex. But there will be a book and a sizable sum of money if you will agree to perform certain tasks for the people I represent."

No surprise. Just a calm question. "And who are these people?" I explained, told her about our need for communication with Dr. Stegner, offered to arrange publication of her book in the U.S. and to make a substantial deposit to her account in London. I could see that as soon as I mentioned Stegner to her, I had her. For the first time since we had met, I saw real enthusiasm in her eyes for something other than her own surgical career, and she dropped her hard reserve enough to exclaim about Stegner's work, about the fantastic surgical team he had trained in Magdeburg, about how much she envied those who were fortunate enough to work on that team, to work in the marvelous Magdeburg laboratory. "Even without Stegner," she said, "Magdeburg will remain the finest transplant facility anywhere in the world for years to come."

We parted amicably, she enthusiastic at her task, bidding me a — for her—warm good-bye at the red-enameled doorway to her town house; I profoundly disturbed at the evening and the personal fail-

ure I took it to be, although I was satisfied that Celia Austin would do for us what we wished. It was a long flight back to Berlin, and I dreaded the loneliness of my flat in the *Hansaviertel*.

Back at my desk the next morning, I went over a number of exfiltration plans my staff had worked up during my absence. The most likely involved the scheduled shipment of three ten-KVA oil-filled transformers from a plant in Cottbus to Schonefeld airfield in East Berlin and then on to Tanzania, where the East Germans had a development project going. It looked like it might be feasible to waylay the truck carrying the transformers, drain the oil out of one cooling chamber, and fit a short, pudgy man like Stegner into the space thus created. There were a lot of problems. Stegner would need oxygen equipment. We would have to get together a crew of clandestine agents who could hijack the truck, cut open the cooling chamber, and re-weld it after Stegner was inside. And then we would need a good recovery crew in Tanzania, which is not the easiest country for "Europeans" to operate in. But with all these problems, it seemed the best bet.

We got to work. My staff laid on the action crew with a good deal of grumbling that we were risking a number of valuable clandestine assets just to get one swish doctor out. Our colleagues in Tanzania

recruited the recovery crew in Dar es Salaam. I went to work on rendezvous points, recognition signals, and all the other clandestine claptrap that makes a "black" operation go. For a week, the cables flew back and forth and the money poured out of the Finance Office in large, green streams. Finally, with only a few days to go before the Leipzig meeting, I flew back to London to brief Dr. Austin. It was a short, no nonsense, unemotional meeting, and I came back feeling even more lonely. Krista had dropped completely out of sight.

The Leipzig meeting began on September 3rd, and we had the truck hijacking set up for the 5th, the scheduled day of shipment, three days before the end of the meeting. If all went according to plan, Stegner would be well out of East Germany and probably in friendly hands in Dar es Salaam before he was missed in Magdeburg. On the 4th, however, we got an emergency transmission from our man in Cottbus reporting that the plant had screwed up its production schedule and was delaying shipment of the transformers indefinitely. We sent recall messages out to all our agents and scrubbed the whole operation. "Karl" got word to our man in Magdeburg, who made the trip to Leipzig and told Stegner that our plans had been changed, and I sat at my desk in despair, too tired and discouraged to start in immediately on a

new plan. I still wonder if the original plan would have worked.

On the 8th, Dr. Austin stopped off at Tempelhof on her way back to London, and we had a talk. She was just as lovely as ever, maybe more so with the animation her experiences in Leipzig had given her. She was full of enthusiasm for what Stegner and his team were doing. "Any physiologist or surgeon in the world would give his eyeteeth to work in that laboratory," she said. "You had better watch out that you don't have defections from the West."

Somehow, I didn't think she was speaking entirely in jest, although she smiled broadly enough, and I made a mental note of the fact. But she expressed real disappointment that we had been unable to get Stegner out. "Poor man. The communists are such terribly strait-laced people, aren't they. He had a very good friend, a young orderly in the hospital, and they transferred him off somewhere. Poor Dr. Stegner is most awfully cut-up about it. Says it happens every time." She shivered in a kind of impatience. "He is such a brilliant man; you would not believe some of the exciting things they are doing there. Pity he is so tormented by his own drives." She shook her head in honest concern. "I suggested he might undertake hormonal therapy; some of our people have been able to do quite remarkable things with the testic-

ular endocrines, but he refused. Rather violently, I'm afraid. It was the only time he seemed angry with me."

I nodded at all this and thought what a pity it was that Celia Austin didn't have a few tormenting drives of her own. I would have been quite happy to relieve her of any pain. But of course it was a vain thought, and I did not even bother to ask her to stay over a day or so to see the Wall or go to the opera or visit the Dahlem Museum or shop along the Ku'damm.

The funny thing is, she decided—it seemed on the spur of the moment—to stay over and see the Wall and go to the opera and visit the Dahlem Museum and shop along the Ku'damm. I got her a suite at the Hotel am Zoo, and because she readily agreed to a dinner date and it was still midmorning and I was suspicious, I put a man on her. It turned out to be a shrewd move. Three hours after I had delivered her to her hotel, she was at a car-rental agency picking up a Mercedes 190. I caught up with her at an auto-body shop at the Hallesches Tor. A mechanic had the rear seat of the Mercedes out and was doing something to the springs under it. I pulled her out of the waiting room and around the corner to a little bar better known for its discretion than the quality of its booze.

"It won't work," I said when we were seated.

"Why not? There's plenty of room under the seat for someone Stegner's size."

"Sure. But that's the trouble with you amateurs. I know there's room and you know there's room and that mechanic back there knows there's room. Don't you suppose that every VOPO along the Wall knows it too?"

"Surely they don't check every Mercedes that crosses into East Berlin!"

"About every other one."

"So, you see? We have at least a fifty percent chance."

"Yeah. At least a fifty percent chance that you and Stegner will spend the next fifteen years in Bautzen prison!"

"I'll take the chance. It's worth it to me. If Stegner get out and can duplicate that marvelous laboratory here in the West, perhaps I can . . ."

"Well, I won't take the chance. I want Stegner out, not rotting in jail somewhere." I didn't want to say it, but I didn't want to see Celia Austin rotting in jail either. The waste of her obvious talents was too great already. "Forget it, Celia. You go back to the garage, tell the nice man you want the car, and drive it back to the rental agency. I'll follow you there and take you back to your hotel. I want you on the six o'clock flight to Frankfurt and London."

She hung her head and nodded, and full of masculine self-

assurance, I was too stupid to suspect her ready acquiescence. We left then and I picked up my car and drove by the garage just in time to see her headed at top speed in the wrong direction, not toward the rental agency, but down Gitschiner Strasse, hell bent for leather toward Checkpoint Charlie. I turned around as fast as I could and took off after her, but I was too late. By the time I got to the corner of Kochstrasse and Friedrichstrasse, the crossing boom had dropped down behind her, and she was getting out of the Mercedes to present her papers to the duty VOPO officer.

And then started the worst six weeks of my life. At first, I got eaten out all up and down the line—from echelons of bureaucrats I hadn't even known existed—for letting Dr. Austin get away to pull the kind of dumb stunt we all thought she was going to pull. We expected at any moment to get reports of her capture, along with Stegner, at one of the crossing points.

Then, when a couple of weeks had gone by and there was no sign of them, we began to suspect that Dr. Austin had herself defected, and I recalled with some discomfort her jest on the subject. I tried to get some information via "Karl", but our man in Magdeburg could report only that Stegner had been very ill for several weeks and was only just now beginning to resume

his leadership in the laboratory. Of Celia Austin there was no word.

And then, on October 18th, I got a letter from her. A letter! It was postmarked Magdeburg, and had undoubtedly been read by every postal censor and security man between there and West Berlin. It said simply: "Dear Mr. Haskins. I have had a perfectly marvelous time. A truly unique experience. I look forward to telling you all about it when I arrive in Berlin on the twentieth."

Amateurs! I thought. If she ever makes it out of East Germany with Stegner, it'll be in a box. But I went down to Friedrichstrasse and Checkpoint Charlie on the 20th anyway. I wanted to witness the final act, disastrous as it was bound to be.

It was a grey day, with roiling clouds and a hint of snow in the air. But there was still reasonably good light at 3:15 when I spotted her green Mercedes as she parked it in front of the VOPO office. Through my binoculars, I could see her move with an odd awkwardness, her light coat blown open in the cold wind, her long slim legs and imperial chest impressive across two hundred meters of somber barriers and scabrous apartment house walls. After a few minutes, a squad of VOPO mechanics went to work on the car. They practically took it apart. Out came the seats, the spare tire,

the battery, anything that looked like it might hide a mouse, much less a pudgy, homosexual East German surgeon and physiologist.

To my infinite surprise, they apparently found nothing, and after another half hour of reassembly, Dr. Austin returned to the Mercedes, started the motor, and began weaving through the slalom of barricades that leads to the white line painted across Friedrichstrasse to mark the border. The final barrier pole lifted for her, and she drove on across to park in front of the West Berlin police barracks. An American GI whistled appreciatively as she drove slowly by him.

I met her in the doorway of the police office, and took her gently by the arm. She looked at me for a moment, almost as if she failed to recognize me, and then gave me one of the warmest smiles I had ever seen. She said nothing. I said nothing, only tugged her down the street and into a warm Bavarian restaurant full of fireplaces, zither music and fat German girls in dirndls. I helped her off with her coat, got us seated in one side of a secluded booth, and started to babble foolish things. "Jeez, Celia, I'm glad to see you back. You had me worried. I was afraid you'd do something stupid about Stegner. I mean, I'm sorry we haven't gotten Stegner out, but the important

thing is that you're all right."

She remained wordless, only smiling at me with that strangely warm smile, a look in her eyes far more feminine than I had ever seen there before. I am fairly expert at looks, and impossible as it seemed, there was desire in her eyes, nice, comforting, uncomplicated, old-fashioned lust. I couldn't help responding with one arm and then with the other arm and then a caress of that wonderful back, assertive shoulder blades under a satin blouse, and then lips. And her response unbelievably ardent, and . . .

I came up for air, suddenly aware of the audience of fat German girls in dirndls, giggling.

"My God, Celia. What's happened to you?" I whispered, a good deal of irrepressible delight in my voice.

She nuzzled her head on my shoulder, sighed, and pressed against me as if she were desperate for warmth, and I noticed for the first time the fine white scar that circled her head beneath the short, glossy black hair. She spoke very softly, profound relief, incredible passion in her voice: "You are everyt'ing she said you would be. Mein Gott! but it is vunderful endlich to be frei!"

Her heavy German accent made me feel decidedly queer.

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